The Thessalonians Letters

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1 Thessalonians 1:1

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is a beautiful way of addressing them. It is not so much about the church in Thessalonica, as about 'the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ'. The position of the Church is not first and foremost here on earth in some town or locality, but 'in Christ', and therefore the letters are very carefully addressed. For example, in:

Ephesians 1:1–2

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

'In Christ Jesus' is our present position as members of His body, and that is why you find just such an address here in 1 Thessalonians too.

And then in verse 1 comes the usual greeting: 'Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.' Grace and peace are the most important characteristics of the New Covenant, of which Christ is the embodiment of grace. Opposite the Old Covenant of the law stands the New Covenant of grace. Opposite the Old Covenant of law, with all the conflict that follows from it, stands the peace of the New Covenant.

1 Thessalonians 1:2

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

In this chapter, and also in chapters 2 and 3, the apostle describes at length his bond with the Thessalonians. He does so against the background that his preaching of the gospel was by no means always appreciated, and therefore by no means always fruitful. It was often rejected. More than that, he sometimes had to flee because of the hostility that his preaching stirred up.

But in Thessalonica it was clearly different. There the Word found an entrance – a breath of fresh air for the apostle. He has good memories of his time in Thessalonica.

The word translated 'prayers' here has the sense of speaking out loud, especially to someone who is in a higher position. It does not necessarily mean that Paul was continually asking the Lord for favours or blessings on behalf of the Thessalonians. It simply means that he spoke to God about the Thessalonians. God is thanked for them. Paul was glad of them and grateful for what he had been allowed to do, especially because it bore fruit here on earth.

1 Thessalonians 1:3

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

He prays 'without ceasing', not remembering simply their work, but:

'Your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.'

The Word has not only found an entrance, it is also bearing fruit. They have not only come to faith, it has had practical consequences in their lives – and it is in that that Paul feels his bond with the Thessalonians.
Faith does not exist without love; and the other way round, love cannot exist without trust, without faith. Faith and love belong together; in practice they are two sides of the same thing.
The sentence builds up in a rising series: first 'work', then 'labour' (that is, hard work), and then, logically, 'patience' – endurance, which is also hard work. These are not set side by side as three completely separate things. It is one thing: work, labour, patience – all of it activity that springs from faith. They are different words, but in practice they are inseparably connected and overlap. This kind of style is used in order to underline the main point: it is not faith as such that matters, but an active faith, a faith that bears fruit in our lives and that comes out in 'works of faith'.
How does Paul know that things are going so well with the faith of the Thessalonians? From their works. James says the same – and rightly so, as is clear from James 2. A person can say he has faith, but if he has no works, then we shall in any case never know for sure. What we do know for sure is that, if he is a believer, his faith is a dead faith – a faith that is completely detached from everyday practical life.
The world is full of religious people who say they believe something, but in the daily practice of their lives it means nothing at all. Are they really believers then? You can ask the question, but so far as practical purposes go, the answer is 'no'. As for the rest, I leave that to the Lord.
'Hope', that is, expectation, is what we as believers have – it is what distinguishes us from the rest of the world. God has made promises to us. We usually associate 'hope' with the future, with the second coming of Christ. Hope is then the expectation of future things. But that is a misunderstanding. Hope, expectation, is also meant for now. Our hope in God is not only for the future in the sense of the return of Christ. In general, the subject of this letter is 'sanctification', and that directs our hope towards the Lord for today.
Hope is not a thing that skips an entire period and then only comes into play at the second coming. Hope is hope for today. I also think of the words of brother Klaas Rozendaal: if we do not receive it from the Lord today, we shall not receive it from Him in the future either. When we are with the Lord, we shall not receive anything from Him that we have not already been given now. We can only grow in the knowledge of what we have already received. We can share in it more. We can make more use of it. We shall grow in that. But once we are with the Lord, after the rapture of the Church, we shall not receive something entirely new that we do not already possess now.
'But we shall receive a glorious body then, shall we not?' In that connection, according to Scripture, I believe that we already have that glorious body now, and that it is increasing and changing 'from glory to glory':

> 2 Corinthians 3:18
> But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

You cannot see that, but we know that:

> 2 Corinthians 5:1
> For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The only ‘building’ that we have then is with the Lord – but we have that now as well, because we are already with the Lord. We have been made to sit in the heavenlies:

> Ephesians 2:6
> And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

We shall come back to this, for when we speak about the rapture of the Church, one of the most striking things in those passages is that nowhere are we told where we go to – for the simple reason that we are not really going anywhere. We are already seated in the heavenlies in Christ.

Whether you feel it or not, whether you notice it or not, that you have such a heavenly body makes no difference. Our new body will be ‘glory’, a body of glory, but the Bible says we have already received that glory now. So we already have such a glorious body, or at least it is under construction, in growth.

The idea is that when we die we do not ‘go to heaven’, but at most ‘go away from the earth’. Paul says:

> Philippians 1:23
> For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

Not ‘to go’ to Christ, but ‘to be with’ Christ. The only thing is that you are loosed from the limitations that this earthly body imposes.

In verse 3 ‘faith, hope and love’ are brought together. Scripture teaches that these three remain:

> 1 Corinthians 13:13
> And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

But with regard to ‘hope’ it is said: when what you hope for has been received, it is no longer hope:

> Romans 8:24
> For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

When do we have hope? Now, throughout this life, day in, day out. It will remain with us; it will dwell in us – that is, abide in us – for the sake of every single day, and of course culminating in the great climax that lies ahead in the future.

> **1 Thessalonians 1:4**
> Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

Regarding ‘election’, I always say it is actually very simple. I prefer that to setting out a whole complicated doctrine, especially about what it is not.

The election of God simply has to do with the fact that God has chosen us **in Christ**, ‘before the foundation of the world’:

> Ephesians 1:4
> According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

God made His choice back then already—not on the basis of His foreknowledge, as though He looked ahead, saw who would believe or not believe, and then chose accordingly—but simply on the basis that everyone who believes is, from God’s side, in advance included in that election.

We should not mystify these things.
On the basis of the Bible's teaching that God knows the future and can therefore make it known, you could say: God does know who will believe and who will not. This idea is often followed by saying, thinking, or even living as though: 'The Lord knows anyway, so it will all turn out well.' The next step then is— and here you really cross a line—'If God knows it beforehand, then it is fixed beforehand and we can't do anything about it.'
But Scripture teaches that the responsibility for our salvation lies with us. It does not depend on whether God has decided it in advance. He has not predetermined whether you or I would believe. God knows it, yes—but the conclusion that therefore it is fixed in such a way that we can do nothing about it, is wrong. It is similar to the conclusion of universalists, who think that, because everything is fixed beforehand, everything will automatically end well for everyone.
God has said that He will give eternal life to all who believe. God has chosen Christ; and He chooses believers to have a share in the election of Christ, and thus in a new creation. If you want to share in this election, then you must come to faith. To the extent that we are in Christ, we are elect. There has never been anyone elected in order that he should come into Christ.
That God has chosen us has little meaning if it does not have a follow–up. We have been chosen out of something for a certain purpose. That is often bundled together in theology under the heading 'election', but that is not quite correct. Biblically, election is followed by predestination. In theology those terms are often thrown together, but they really are distinct—even though they belong closely together and lie in each other's line.
The goal is stated in Ephesians 1:

> Ephesians 1:4–5
> According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Here we are told what the ultimate goal is. 'Having predestinated us' lies directly in the line of election. Election looks back—from eternity past up to the present.
Predestination looks from the present forward to the final future. The two are joined. He has determined our final destination beforehand: He has predestinated us 'unto the adoption of children' (literally: the placing as sons—heirs).
As soon as one becomes a child of God by faith, one is thereby predestined to be, in the future, a son of God in the sense of an heir. That has to do with glory, inheritance, reward—and is the result of our sanctification. We find ourselves in that process at present, and therefore our hope for today and for the future is directed towards God.
Paul knew of their election, of their position as children of God, and also of the practical outworking of that position.

> **1 Thessalonians 1:5**
> For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

The gospel that Paul preached to the Thessalonians is what we know as 'my gospel', that is, Paul's particular message:

Romans 2:16
In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.
Romans 16:25
Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ...
2 Timothy 2:8
Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:

'Our gospel', he says, 'came not unto you in word only.' It was more than mere words, more than a doctrine, message, or theory. It is about its **effect**—about its meaning and practical consequences in the lives of those who receive the Word.

When I think of 'power', especially 'the power of the Holy Ghost', I think of new birth. It is a great miracle that a person not only comes to faith, but thereby also is born again and receives new life—that he becomes 'a child of God', a new creature in Christ, and is at the same time seated in the heavenlies:

Ephesians 2:6
And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

These words had a powerful effect in those who received the Word. The Holy Spirit became active in them. A riot even broke out in the city—no coincidence. Where the gospel is truly at work, there is power, the Holy Spirit, and therefore also assurance. The Holy Spirit plants the Word of God in our hearts. The Holy Spirit is Christ, is the life of Christ, is the Word of God. Thus that Word is the pledge of the future inheritance, because the Word prepares us for it.

'Assurance' simply means that one is sure of something. That is what hope really is. In the context of the verse, however, it primarily describes what could be seen outwardly. Power itself cannot be seen, in itself it is abstract. You cannot see the Holy Spirit, and not 'assurance' either. But the 'work of faith', the 'labour of love', the 'patience of hope'—those you can see. Verse 5 is therefore the deeper background of verse 3. What is said in verse 3 flows from this, says Paul—from the working of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 5 the apostle first looks back to the days when he himself was among the Thessalonians. He describes the background of those events and reminds them: 'as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.' He recalls what happened, and what he as an apostle did—namely, preach the Word. The result became visible in those who 'gladly received his word' (Acts 2:41).

1 Thessalonians 1:6
And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

That is what the Word does. I think evangelists greatly underestimate the power of the Word of God. They think far too much that their words and their activities must accomplish it, and they do not leave it to the Word of God. We should have more confidence in the gospel, which 'is the power of God unto salvation'':

Romans 1:16
For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...

We do not have to produce the results ourselves. We just have to preach the Word—that is what has effect. If it does not, it is because the seed does not fall into 'good soil': Matthew 13 (the parable of the sower)
The Word is sown everywhere, and if it springs up, it is not because the sower did such a fine job. If the ground is poor, then however carefully you sow, it will not help. The point is the power of the seed, not the power of the sower. The same is true of the apostle Paul.
Paul was a 'follower of the Lord'. He preached the Word of the Lord. When people received his word, they became followers of Paul, and therefore followers 'of the Lord'. Both the Lord and Paul are examples, also in their personal way of life, for believers in our time:

> 1 Corinthians 11:1
> Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

Paul received the Word 'in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost'. The Lord Jesus did the same:

> Hebrews 5:8
> Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

> **1 Thessalonians 1:7**
> So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

Jesus and Paul are examples for the believing Thessalonians. In turn, they became examples for all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia—that is, practically the whole of Greece. Macedonia is the northern part, Achaia the southern part. Together they form what we call 'Greece', though that country did not exist then in its current political form.

> **1 Thessalonians 1:8**
> For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God–ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything.

The reputation of the church at Thessalonica—their faith, that is, their trust in God—'sounded out' from them. Not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but 'in every place'. Paul was proud of them. What he has for them is encouragement and comfort, not criticism. In that they differ from the Corinthians.

> **1 Thessalonians 1:9**
> For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

The apostle proclaims very practical truth. Although these people had once been converted and had come to faith, the point is that in the practice of their lives they should no longer serve idols. They should serve the living and true God—the God who is committed to the truth.
We as believers likewise should walk in all truthfulness, or, as it says in Ephesians:

> Ephesians 4:15
> But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

It is about practical Christianity. I keep emphasising this, because that is what these passages are about. The idea is not that God's work is completed at the moment

someone comes to faith; rather, God's work begins in a believer at the moment he believes:

> Philippians 1:6
> Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ:

God's intention is to bring that 'good work' which He has begun to completion 'until the day of Jesus Christ'. In this way we serve the truth now, in the present time—that is, we no longer serve idols, but 'the living and true God'.

> **1 Thessalonians 1:10**
> And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, [even] Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

We are waiting for His Son from heaven, the One 'whom he raised from the dead'—Jesus, 'which delivered us from the wrath to come.'

There is a beautiful passage in Titus which sums up the whole 'present truth':

> Titus 2:11–14
> For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; 13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; 14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

In this present time we should live 'soberly'—that is: with restraint—'righteously, and godly, in this present world'. In verse 13 the subject is the future: we are 'looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ'. That God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, 'gave himself for us' so that He might now, in this present time, redeem us from all iniquity. He is purifying for Himself 'a peculiar people'—His own special people. The Lord is doing a work in us now, but within the framework of 'denying ungodliness and worldly lusts', 'living soberly and righteously and godly', and 'looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour'.

When will He come from heaven? We do not know a date, but the question is actually answered quite simply: at the end of the 'seventieth week of Daniel', according to several Scriptures that we must compare, as Peter urges us to do (2 Peter 1:19). The idea is that at the end of that seventieth week the Lord will set His feet upon the Mount of Olives:

> Zechariah 14:4
> And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives…

'But do we not expect the rapture of the Church?' Biblically, however, we are taught to expect the second coming of Christ—'the appearing of the glory':

> Colossians 3:4
> When Christ, [who is] our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

That is our true future expectation. That event does not take place at the rapture of the Church, but at the return of Christ, and that is not the same thing. We have the promise that we shall be 'placed as sons' with Christ, and that as such, and thus in glory, we

shall be manifested together with Him in the manifestation of His glorious kingdom, His rule.
'His Son', the risen One ('whom he raised from the dead'), delivers us 'from the wrath to come'. We have been delivered, and on that basis we have nothing to do with 'the wrath to come', for:

> 1 Thessalonians 5:9
> For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

When the 'wrath of God' comes in the future, we shall in some way be delivered from it. On the basis of our position in Christ we do not come under that wrath. That is also what we read in John 3:

> John 3:17–19, 36
> For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

The present judgment consists in this, that God hides Himself from the world. Since then nothing has been revealed to the world; only to those who, out of the world, have come to Christ. 'Is not condemned' (verse 18) means that the believer does not live under the judgment that the unbeliever does live under in this present time. What is called 'condemnation' in verses 17–19 is called 'wrath' in verse 36. That is the passive wrath of God, in the sense that God does nothing—He leaves mankind to itself.
In the future, the active wrath of God comes. That is the 'wrath to come' of 1 Thessalonians 1:10—the time when God will act.
In Romans 5 we are also told that the world now lives under God's wrath:

> Romans 5:9
> Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

From which wrath? From the 'present wrath', or from the 'wrath to come', which will come in the future upon the whole earth, upon Israel, and upon all the nations? In fact it makes no difference: from both we are 'saved through Him'.

> Romans 5:10
> For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

From time to time you read that 'the protecting hand of God' has been taken away from the Western society. That protecting hand has never been there in that sense. The whole world lies under the wrath of God — the Western society as well. So far as there is a protecting hand of God, it rests over the believers, over the Church.
The living Christ preserves us from the wrath. Another word for 'Saviour' is Healer or Preserver. 'Saviour' also in the sense of Sustainer: He sustains us; He cares for us; He cares for His Church, and therefore also for each individual member of the Church. That is what is being said here: 'much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life' — by His active life, by what He does. That is what we call 'the present work of Christ'.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-3

For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: 2 But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. 3 For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

In chapter 2 Paul discusses faithfulness in the preaching of the Word of God, just as Paul himself was faithful in his ministry, in which the Lord had 'counted [him] faithful':

1 Timothy 1:12

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

1 Thessalonians 2:4

But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

'So we speak' — that is, as tested, as faithful servants of God. We should serve God and be faithful in that service.

1 Corinthians 4:1–2

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

It is the same thought. We are to serve the Lord. As tested servants of God we should not aim to please people. That is the same idea as in Galatians 1:

Galatians 1:10–12

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. 11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. 12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught [it], but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The message comes from God and is to His glory — that is what we preach. If it does not appeal to people, in the sense that they do not want to hear it, I cannot help that; that is not my responsibility.

In Matthew 13 the sower went out to sow, and he scattered the seed everywhere we ourselves probably would not have sown it. Who sows seed by the wayside or on rocky ground? Yet apparently that is not the sower's responsibility in that parable. He sows everywhere, and whether it comes up or not is not his responsibility. If it falls into good ground, it comes up; if not, it does not. But that is not the sower's fault. That is how it is presented.

We are servants of God, not servants of people. We should be faithful to God in every part of life. That applies to every child of God, because every child of God is a servant of God. And then this applies:

Colossians 3:23–24

And whatsoever ye do, do [it] heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

Faithfulness is not found in everyone, but we should be faithful to the Lord. What we do, we do for the Lord, in His service. Of course that is for the blessing of people; that can hardly be otherwise, and that is indeed the intention — but it is in His service, that is the point. The Lord is also the One who will reward us for that on the 'day of Christ', that is, when we are manifested before the judgement seat of Christ to receive the inheritance. Paul is basically saying: I cannot justify it before God if I am not faithful to my ministry. Christ tests our hearts. He is saying: this has nothing to do with you; it has to do with my personal relationship with my own Lord, in whose service I stand. That is true for every child of God (see Romans 14:4).

1 Thessalonians 2:5

For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

'Flattering words' — and a good deal of preaching consists of them. The most obvious and widespread alternative preaching is still the preaching of law: Do this, do that, do not do this, do not do that. In reality even that already contains flattering words, because the underlying idea is that man is in fact capable of keeping that law, of doing what he ought to do and leaving undone what he ought not to do.

Ask a Jew, for instance: he preaches the law, but Jews do not believe that man is fundamentally bad. To be honest, no religion does. Christendom as a religion is no better; it does not want to admit it either, but still starts from the idea that there is something good in man. Paul says:

Romans 7:18

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing:

God says, by the mouth of Paul, that man by nature is a sinner, and from that nature he is capable of no good:

Romans 3:12

They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

If that is so, you really cannot go on preaching law. Yet people like to hear the law, because it carries the idea: if I only try hard enough, it will work out. So apparently it is in me.

In preaching that flatters, man is treated as if he is good. It is assumed that you only need a bit of courage, perseverance and improved circumstances to fight the bad in man and bring out the good. But you gain nothing with flattering words.

The truth, by contrast, is hard. Truth is unbending; it does not adapt. Truth is truth, and therefore the truth is hard. If you preach the truth, you will soon hear that you are 'unloving'. If they have said that about you as well, you know why.

For the sake of numbers, for market control and so on, you have to speak flattering words — so people say. But that is not biblical preaching. Just read what the Lord Jesus said in His days. Those were not flattering words, not a message of 'let's just be nice to one another' and the like. The Lord Jesus spoke very plainly, and behaved accordingly, particularly towards religious people. He was gentle towards 'His own', those who believed in Him, but even there you find enough occasions where He is quite sharp and short. He even called Peter 'Satan' once, although the man meant so well (Matthew 16:22–23).

So Paul says: our message was not according to man—'as ye know'—'nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness.' A 'cloke' is an excuse, a pretext, a cover. For 'covetousness' you may simply read 'greed' — then you know exactly what it is about. Paul did not preach in order to profit from it, and he adds: 'God is witness.'

> **1 Thessalonians 2:6–7**
> Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

The one who speaks to others can easily feel superior, and then it soon becomes a matter of glory. It is quite an honour when people are willing to listen to you, I must honestly say. It is a form of recognition. But it is very dangerous. That is why Paul writes to Timothy, regarding overseers, that they so easily fall into 'the snare of the devil' (1 Timothy 3:6–7), especially newcomers — they stumble at the same obstacle.
'Nor of men sought we glory … when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.' 'Glory' and 'burdensome' belong together. Honour in English is 'honour', which ties in with 'honorarium'. To 'honour' someone in practice usually means giving them an honorarium. It is directly linked with material things in Scripture. For example:

> 1 Timothy 5:17
> Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

How do you multiply 'honour' by two? The point is that **honour** is expressed in support — financially, in practice.
Likewise:

> 1 Timothy 5:3
> Honour widows that are widows indeed.

There it clearly means they should be provided for — in something that has a value that can be expressed, for example, in money.
'To be burdensome' means that others must support you. Paul says: I could have been a burden to you, because I am an apostle of Christ, but as long as I can provide for myself, I will do so, so that I am not a burden to you. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul expanded on this and said that some other apostles did not have to provide for themselves. Paul did. And then they did not take him seriously as an apostle, because he was not a 'full–timer'; being an apostle was, so to speak, something he did 'on the side', since he was a tent–maker by trade (Acts 18:2–3).
'With 'we were gentle' among you', Paul says that he had behaved as a friend among them. Even 'as a nurse cherisheth her children' — someone who has responsibility for her children and also bears the cost of them. Paul is saying that he likewise bore the cost for the Thessalonians.

> **1 Thessalonians 2:8**
> So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

They had imparted to them 'not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls'. In biblical usage, 'soul' here is Paul devoted his practical life to the Thessalonians during

the time he was in Thessalonica. He loved them, and that is why he did this for them, in spite of the persecution.
In this the apostle is an example for all believers. We should love one another and genuinely care for one another. For as far as we serve one another, it should be in the service of God, of the Lord Jesus Christ, and because we love one another. That is not always mutual, but that is not the point. It is not always mutual with the Lord either. He loves the Church, but that does not mean that all church members in practice love Him.

> **1 Thessalonians 2:9–10**
> For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. 10 Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

'Holy and unblameable' are standard terms for the Church. 'Holy' means 'set apart', but also 'devoted to the service of God', 'separated unto the service of God'. Paul uses this in the opening of his letters. For example:

> Romans 1:1
> Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

'Justly' (or 'righteously') does not mean keeping the law, but rather the opposite: living in the awareness that, according to the law, we have died to the law and are therefore free from it:

> Galatians 2:19
> For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

We have died, as to the old man, and therefore as to the law and sin. We are freed from the law, but on the other hand we have become the Lord's property. He has bought us (1 Corinthians 6:20), and therefore it is only right that we should serve the One whose property we are. Then we are 'unblameable'. That is the present work of Christ in us.

> **1 Thessalonians 2:11–12**
> As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, 12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

'To walk worthy of God' corresponds to Philippians 2:12:

> Philippians 2:12
> Wherefore, my beloved, … work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

That we are the children of God and that the life of God, the life of Christ, is in us, should became visible in works. What is elsewhere — and also here — called 'walking' is simply our practical life. That should be in harmony with the God whom we serve, and we should be conscious of that.

> **1 Thessalonians 2:13**
> For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received [it] not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

It remains the Word of God, even though they received it from Paul. The Word of God really works in a person; 'the word of men' does not, not in the biblical sense.
Here it says that the 'word of God … effectually worketh also in you that believe'. That is often underestimated. In many circles it is thought that we must work. Others think God works in us, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit. That is indeed biblical, but it is not yet fully understood. In practice, God works in us by His Word — that has always been so throughout the Old Testament. In the New Testament the same principle is fully active. God works in us through His Word; and so far as the Spirit works in us, He 'will guide you into all truth', said the Lord (John 16:13). He leads us into the Word, so that the Word may do its work in us.
So: 'the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.'
The effect of that Word is that we love one another, but first of all that we learn to love that Word itself, and thereby to love the Lord. If loving the Lord Jesus Christ does not come very easily, it is because one does not know Him. You cannot love someone you do not know.
How do we get to know Him? Through the Word He has left us — through the letters He has written to us. But if you do not read or know the letters, you will never love the Author. Love for the Lord Jesus, love for one another, and love for the Word arises by dealing with that Word, by taking it in. The believers in Thessalonica had done so; of that the apostle is convinced.

1 Thessalonians 2:14

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

'The churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus' — that means the churches of God in Judaea, consisting of believers who were originally Jews. They were, however, no longer Jews in a religious sense — and that is the only sense that really counts in Scripture.
Jews are Jews because they belong to the Jewish religion. That is why it does not say 'the churches of God that are Jews', but 'the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus'. That should have been clear to everyone, including the Thessalonians — who also consisted primarily of Jews originally, as we know from Acts 17. They had been Jews, but after coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ they 'suffered of the Jews', as it says here. I find that a beautiful phrasing, because it only makes sense if you assume that these believers were no longer Jews.
The Christian churches in Judaea, in Jerusalem first of all, suffered at the hands of the Jews. Likewise in Thessalonica, as Acts shows: Jews who had come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ were persecuted by the Jews.
To be 'a Jew' is not really a matter of descent, but of religion. You belong to Israel if you serve the God of Israel. Naomi, for example, was of Jewish descent, but her daughter–in–law Ruth was not, not even of Israelite descent; she was a Moabitess. Yet she said:

Ruth 1:16

… thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

One belongs to Israel if one serves the God of Israel.

1 Thessalonians 2:15–16

Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: 16 Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

It is not only that the Jews persecute the Christians; they also killed the Lord Jesus Himself, and in former days they killed their own prophets. (Compare Matthew 23:31; Romans 3.) Paul and his co-workers they likewise persecuted.

'They please not God' — and yet Israel was originally called to please God. Israel was to be 'a people for his name', a people who would serve the LORD. They were to be a royal and priestly nation on behalf of all mankind. In the future this will indeed come to pass, as we know from the prophetic Word. After the conversion of Israel, that nation will at last serve God, not only keeping the Word of God, but proclaiming it over all the earth, with the result that the kingdom of Christ will be manifested worldwide.

Paul also says: 'and [are] contrary to all men.' Why does he add that?

1 Thessalonians 2:16

Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Instead of preaching the gospel, as they should have done, the Jews stalled it. Instead of being for all men, they are thus against all men. They do not please God, and in this way, says the apostle, 'they fill up their sins alway'. That is, they have always done so, and they continue to do so, all through the present dispensation.

We perhaps do not realise this, because we often hear the story from only one side, namely that, in spite of everything, mission work is still carried on among the Jews. But there is also very intense mission carried on by the Jews — among the Jews — in the interest of Judaism. They want to preserve some kind of Jewish identity: propaganda for the Jewish religion, and quite specifically propaganda against Christianity. Not only in Jerusalem and its surroundings, but worldwide. This is also indeed done out of hostility towards the Lord Jesus and therefore towards Christians.

Until a remnant of the Jewish people, officially and as a Jewish people, 'shall call on the name of the LORD' (Joel 2:32), they 'fill up their sins alway'; and so it also says: 'for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.'

That brings us back to the theme of wrath, from which, as Paul said in chapter 1 verse 10, God delivers us.

1 Thessalonians 2:17–18

But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

'Satan' is the Greek form of the Hebrew word for 'adversary'. He hindered Paul from meeting the brethren and being with them. Twice Paul made plans to travel to Thessalonica, but he was not able to do so. He then explains why he was so eager:

1 Thessalonians 2:19–20

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20 For ye are our glory and joy.

Paul is proud, in a good sense, of that church, and he feels deeply bound to them. They are his joy, his hope, his crown, his boasting. That explains why he wanted to visit them so much. He also says: you are this 'in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.'
For the Church as such is the crown, the glory and the joy of the Lord Jesus. The Church is His work. That Paul is involved in it is grace; that we may be involved, perhaps also in the work itself, is likewise the grace of God — but it remains His work.
When the Lord comes 'at his coming' (that is, at the end of Daniel's seventieth week), He will come in great power and glory, together with the whole Church. The Thessalonians form part of that glory. Paul already has these things in mind.
In Isaiah there are two statements that 'the LORD will come with his reward'. Although those passages do not directly speak of the Church, the context shows that they can indeed be applied to the Lord and **His reward**, namely His Church.

> Isaiah 40:10
> Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

'The strong hand' in the English text is, in practice, against the devil, and more specifically against the antichrist. Because the Church as such is hidden in the Old Testament, she is indicated here by other terms — in this verse as 'his work', is correctly connected with 'his wages', His earned reward.

> Isaiah 62:11–12
> Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. 12 And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.

The 'daughter of Zion', the daughter of Jerusalem, is in the first place Israel. The Lord will come with His reward — not with our reward, and not with their reward. 'The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD', in verse 12, is linked with that 'reward' in verse 11. The Church is also a people.

> **1 Thessalonians 3:1–2**
> Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; 2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

With this last verse the apostle has, for the third time on this page (in my Bible at least), arrived at the subject of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Paul's bond with these believers in Thessalonica — who had come to faith through his ministry — is very strong. Yet he had only seen them for a short time, because he had to flee from Thessalonica after a very brief stay.
The apostle travelled on alone, via Berea, to Athens (Acts 17:15). He left Timothy behind. That is the background of 3:1. What Acts does not say, we learn here in 1 Thessalonians 3: Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica to find out how things were among the believers there. Timothy later reported this to Paul, who was very anxious to know whether these 'young believers' in Thessalonica would stand firm. Paul was clearly greatly concerned about them.

Timothy was sent to them 'to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith' (v.2). 'To comfort' ('exhort' in English) translates the Greek parakaleō and here certainly means 'to comfort, to encourage'. That is the work of **the Comforter**. It is also the work which the Lord Jesus Christ does for us as Head of the Church and as 'the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls' (1 Peter 2:25).
'To establish' and 'to comfort' have practically the same force. In practice they mean that believers are strengthened and built up, encouraged and therefore comforted in the faith, so that, as verse 3 says:

> **1 Thessalonians 3:3**
> That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

This is a popular verse among those who believe that the Church must go through **the** great tribulation. But in fact this verse does not speak of 'the great tribulation' at all. It speaks about what Peter also writes:

> 1 Peter 2:21
> For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

Here, instead of 'appointed', it says 'called' — called to 'suffer wrongfully' (v.19). In practice Peter is dealing with exactly the same things as Paul in 1 Thessalonians: with believers who are persecuted, who suffer, who are slandered and oppressed; who are treated as 'evildoers' (v.12) — unjustly, of course, just as the Lord Jesus was, whose footsteps we are to follow.

> **1 Thessalonians 3:4–5**
> For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. 5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

So Paul says that during his visit to them he had already foretold that 'we should suffer tribulation'. He had told them in advance how it would go; and he says: 'even as it came to pass, and ye know.'
The opposition comes from 'the tempter'. Here it is not a question of testing (in the positive sense). The difference is that 'temptation' has a negative thrust and a destructive aim: to ruin. 'Testing', by contrast, has a positive aim: instruction and building up. A test at school, for instance, is intended to be constructive.

> James 1:2–4
> My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

The word 'temptations' here is immediately taken up by James in the sense of testing: 'the trying of your faith'. Temptation itself is negative, and that is also its purpose, for temptation comes from the tempter.
We know this from the Lord's Prayer:

> Matthew 6:13
> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
> — that is, from the evil one, the tempter.

James immediately takes the word ‘temptation’ up as ‘trial’ and applies it positively, because the intention is that in such situations we should rest our trust upon the Lord alone. The following verses deal with this; and to make it absolutely clear, he adds in

> James 1:13
> Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.

God is of course not engaged in destructive work. Rather, Scripture illustrates how temptation, which comes from the adversary, can in practice work out greatly for our good. We should view it as a trial of our faith, from God’s side.

If there is opposition, if for the sake of our faith we get into difficult circumstances, we should see it as testing from God. It is a situation in which our faith is examined, and by it our faith is built up so that we come out stronger than we went in.

This was certainly true for the Thessalonians, who faced heavy opposition from Judaism at that time. That is how the historical situation looked, and we see the same in:

> 1 Peter 1:6–7
> Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

Again, ‘temptations’ and ‘trial’ are used side by side. Faith is made stronger because there is an adversary; that gives necessary exercise. To ‘count it all joy’ is, to my feeling, rather strongly expressed — but that is how Scripture looks at it.

So Timothy was sent ‘to know your faith’, lest the tempter should in some way have tempted them and made the work of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy vain — empty — by making them give way under opposition and physical persecution. Thankfully, this proved not to be the case. To Paul’s joy, his ministry, his labour, had borne visible fruit.

> **1 Thessalonians 3:6–7**
> But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: 7 Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:

‘Good tidings’ translates euangelizō — the word normally translated ‘to preach the gospel’. It is literally ‘to bring good news’. It is a good message, because it is news of something one may expect. The glad tidings are promised beforehand — that is the sense of the word, both in Greek and in Hebrew.

Paul is really saying that, in fact, he expected nothing else. Why not? Because the thought is this: if someone truly comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and remains in that faith, then the Lord Himself will look after that believer. That is how it is. Only when people turn themselves away from Him, things go wrong. If they remain faithful to Him, the Lord, as our High Priest, our Shepherd, our Head, the Overseer of our souls, will care for them.

> **1 Thessalonians 3:8**
> For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

‘Now’ — that is, after what has happened, after what went before — Paul revives when he hears that things are going well with the Thessalonians, especially concerning their faith. He then immediately writes this letter.
‘Now we live’ has the sense of coming to life again, living in joy. We use the word this way as well: someone who has no joy in life has, in a sense, no life. In English ‘live’ can also mean ‘noise, liveliness’. Someone who ‘makes a lot of life’ is very lively. It expresses activity.
In the same way, we should actually **live** the life of Christ in us. Then we stand firm — we ‘stand fast in the Lord’.

> **1 Thessalonians 3:9–10**
> For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; 10 Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

In truth, we cannot really repay it. We can thank the Lord for the strength He gives; but beyond that, our words are always inadequate.
When we hear ‘that which is lacking’, we tend to think of ‘shortcoming’, but here it simply means ‘that which is not yet complete’, in the sense of ‘not yet fully grown, not yet mature’. As long as that growth — for that is what is in view — is still lacking, Paul desires to contribute to it, for that is his ministry. That is why he wants to travel to Thessalonica, though he is not given the opportunity. Satan had hindered him, as he already wrote in 2:18, and here in 3:11 he says:

> **1 Thessalonians 3:11**
> Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

Here he passes the matter, as it were, into the Lord’s hands: if the Lord opens the way, he will come; if not, then this letter must for now take the place of his personal presence.
That long title places the emphasis on the fact that God arrange it, or the Lord Jesus must do it – and not Satan. It is actually rather uncertain whose will was really at work in Paul’s desire to travel to Thessalonica. If it were merely his own will, then Satan might indeed be able to hinder it. Therefore the apostle now says in this verse: ‘Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.’
There is, of course, one God. He is ‘God himself and our Father’, and He is also ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’. Three expressions are used: ‘God’, ‘our Father himself’, and ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’, but it is the One who is indicated here. The verb ‘direct’ is singular in the Greek (subjunctive, third person singular), which shows that one is in view who ‘directs’. If two separate ‘persons’ were meant as two acting subjects, the verb should have been plural. By the singular ‘direct’, it is clear that Paul is not thinking of two separate beings, however one phrases it, but of one God, namely ‘our God and Father himself, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ’. Or we could paraphrase: ‘our God and Father himself, namely our Lord Jesus Christ.’
The conjunction ‘and’ does not necessarily mean ‘plus’, in the sense of adding two different things together as separate units. ‘Plus’ in arithmetic is indeed adding two distinct quantities; ‘and’ in language works differently. The conjunction ‘and’ can be used in many ways, and in Scripture it very often joins two expressions for the same

One, or closely related aspects, rather than two separate beings. It may join two phrases, not two 'gods'.
Paul hopes that He will do this – that He will indeed allow Paul, at some opportunity, to come again to Thessalonica. With greater emphasis you could hardly say it: God, Christ, Himself must direct our way unto you; and if He does so, then I will indeed come to you, says Paul. If God directs that way to you, then Satan certainly cannot prevent it.
In practice, we ourselves often do not really know whose will is at play in our plans, and when we want something, we also never really know, I think, exactly whose will it is. We cannot oversee that, and we do not need to. One can be hindered by Satan, or one can be hindered by God Himself. Which of us will be able to say, in a given case, how that is? The point is that we should not occupy ourselves with such questions. That is the only conclusion we should draw. The Lord works in the hidden realm, for His kingdom is hidden – and that of the devil is just as hidden. 'Mystery, Babylon the Great', his system, is likewise hidden. (Revelation 17:5.) We do not know how all that runs, but we should be faithful to what we believe, faithful to the ministry which we have. If something then goes wrong, that is sad and to be regretted, but it need not make us collapse.
We remain faithful to the Lord, and if things we had planned do not go ahead, then they simply do not go ahead. That is a pity, but it does not change the fact that we should still do our utmost to carry out what we believe we ought to do.

Philippians 2:13

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Whether a particular desire of ours is truly the will of God – we will discover that along the way. What I mean is this: we must not sit waiting until we have first worked out whether something comes from God or from the devil. If we do that, we become passive, and that was never the intention for the life we have received.

Our sanctification in 1 Thessalonians, with the main threads pulled together.

1. The setting: a God-pleasing walk (4:1–2)

- Paul reminds the believers that they already know how to walk and to please God, and urges them to "abound more and more" in that.
- This ties back to 3:12 – abounding in love toward one another and toward all.
- The Christian life is not static; the will of God is that we grow in this walk as the Word (by the Spirit) shapes us.
- The "commandments" Paul gave are not legalistic burdens but Authoritative instructions from the Lord—teaching that expresses how life in Christ is meant to look.

2. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (4:3)

Sanctification is not mainly "becoming nicer" or socially acceptable; it is:

- Being set apart to God – separated from the world and devoted to His service.
- It's about who you belong to and what you are for, more than about surface respectability.

Key ideas you draw out:

- By nature we serve "the god of this world"; in salvation we are delivered from this present evil age to belong to God.
- Like OT priests and vessels in the temple, we are placed in a new position and use: for God's purposes.
- Children of believers are "sanctified" positionally by their connection to believing parents (1 Cor 7:14) – showing sanctification as status / setting, not inner moral transformation only.
- Creation itself (food, etc.) is "sanctified" for our use by the Word of God and prayer (1 Tim 4:4–5).

So:

Sanctification = separation from the old sphere + dedication to God's service.

3. The three "phases" of our sanctification

1. Past / positional (spirit):
    - We are already called saints; set apart in Christ.
2. Present / practical (soul, walk):
    - Our lifestyle is being adjusted to match what we already are.
    - This is the ongoing "sanctification of the Spirit" in our conduct.
3. Future / bodily (glorification):
    - The redemption and transformation of our body at the rapture, when it's fashioned like Christ's glorious body.

All of this is one unified "good work" God began and will complete (Philippians 1:6).

4. "That ye should abstain from fornication" (4:3)

- In Scripture, fornication often includes idolatry / unfaithfulness to God, not just sexual sin.
- It's the opposite of faithfulness:
    - Faith = fidelity to the Lord
    - Fornication = spiritual infidelity – serving another god, another master.
- Israel as an "adulterous generation" is about religious betrayal, not mainly sexual immorality.

That said, sexual immorality is very much included in the term biblically; Sanctification has a greater scope than just that one area and must not be shrunk to "sexual ethics only."

Continue

5. “To possess his vessel in sanctification and honour” (4:4–5)
- “Vessel” = our body (and by image, our whole person as a tool for use).
- We are like vessels in a great house (2 Tim 2:20–21):
    - Some for honourable use, some for dishonourable.
    - The believer’s calling is to be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and useful to the Master.
- The body is:
    - entrusted to us,
    - belonging to the Lord,
    - to be used in a respectable, God-honouring way.
- Not driven by “the passion of lust” (inner impulses and raw emotion), like Gentiles who don’t know God, but by a heart formed by the Word, not by feelings alone.

6. Love, honesty, and how we treat one another (4:6–7)
Sanctification is deeply relational:
- “That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter”:
    - No cheating, exploiting, or taking advantage of fellow believers.
    - The Lord Himself is the avenger of such things.
- We’re a family of God; sanctification means loving and serving one another, not using each other.
- God has not called us to uncleanness, but unto holiness; our calling is to live out what we are.

7. The seriousness of rejecting sanctification (4:8)
- If someone despises this teaching, he is not merely ignoring Paul as a man, but despising God Himself.
- God has given us His Holy Spirit precisely to enable this sanctification.
- To refuse sanctification is to refuse the very purpose of the Spirit’s presence in us.

Sanctification is God’s will for us: being set apart to Him in position, walking that out in daily life by the Spirit, and ultimately having even our bodies transformed—turning us into vessels of honour, faithful to Christ and not given over to the idolatrous lusts and self-serving ways of a world that doesn’t know God.

1 Thessalonians 3:12–13
And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: 13 To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

The fruit of faith is, first of all, always love. It cannot be otherwise. ‘Faith’ is ‘trust’, and that is, by definition, relationship, fellowship. Fellowship arises through trust; that is what love is. So faith and love logically belong together.

1 Corinthians 13:13
And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

First, this love is 'one toward another' – love among believers, within the Church. Only in the second place do we come to love 'toward all men', including unbelievers. Yes, even towards enemies – whom we are to love; that is the intention. But one will never get that far if one cannot first love the brethren. Therefore Paul writes: 'And the Lord make you to increase and abound …'

Not in number here, but in quality, in spiritual growth. We are to 'abound in love' in that way.

Verse 13 then gives the purpose: 'To the end he may stablish your hearts'. The 'heart' is another word for what we often call 'the inward man', the unseen person. It is not a special organ, even in figurative language, but simply the inner life. We also use the word that way in everyday speech: 'to wear one's heart on one's sleeve' means that what is inside comes outside. In Scripture, the point is the renewal of the inward man:

2 Corinthians 4:16
For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

So it is about the spiritual condition and nature of believers:

'To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness …'

Becoming 'abundant in love one toward another, and toward all men' falls under this heading of sanctification, as these verses show. There is to be a 'holiness' that makes us 'unblameable'. One could also say: there is an unblameable sanctification, which is expressed, first of all, in love – toward one another and toward all – 'before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.'

That sanctification is a work which is done to us, in us. It is not we who do it, but the Lord who does it – better still: the Spirit does it. That is why Scripture speaks of:

2 Thessalonians 2:13
… God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

1 Peter 1:2
Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ …

Romans 1:4
And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

'In the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' refers to the time when we, the Church, will be manifested with Him, revealed in glory. Then we shall be 'unblameable in holiness', and finally proved useful – that is, fully fit – for the service of God.

The intention is that here and now we are in training; that we grow up, mature, are taught, and increase, in order to be ready for our definitive service to the Lord in the future, 'at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

This does not mean that we do not serve Him now, but that our service now is exercise. It is not meaningless, but we should see the relative character of our present service. What really matters in our service now is whether it has an effect within – in us. Even if it brings little visible result outwardly, so long as it has real result in our own lives.

‘The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’ is directly connected with the completion of our ‘training’ and the beginning of our service to Him in the age to come. A line from a song by Tennessee Ernie Ford puts it like this: here we are to serve the Lord, and by that we become ready for our service to Him ‘above’. That is what he calls ‘fitted for our service above’ – fitted, equipped, for our future service. That gives meaning to our life.

> **1 Thessalonians 4:1–3**
> Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. 2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

In verse 1, ‘abound more and more’ refers back, in my view, to 3:12, where it was about ‘abound[ing] in love one toward another, and toward all men’. The intention is that we grow more and more in that, as a result of the Word of God, or, if you will, the Spirit in us. The Word should have its fruit in our walk – in ‘how ye ought to walk and to please God.’ Again, this is not really two separate things, but one: a God-pleasing walk.
We find that expression already in Romans:

> Romans 12:2
> And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

We are to place ourselves – our life – at His disposal. We are not to be conformed to this ‘world/age’ (aion), but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind, the inner man. As a result, we prove in practice ‘what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God’ in our daily life – in our walk. The following verses of Romans 12 talk exactly about that. The first thing mentioned is the unity of the Church as one body, the fellowship that exists, and so the mutual love. That is the basic thought for our entire practical life.

> **1 Thessalonians 4:2**
> For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

The word ‘commandments’ sounds rather strong to our ears, especially in English other Western languages. In Strong's Bible, the term ‘commandment’ is translated from the Greek word ‘entolé’ (Strong's #1785), which means an authoritative prescription or injunction. In Greek, it can have that strong sense (for instance in a military context), but not necessarily. It is indeed used in a military setting for orders, but here we are not dealing with military matters and their ‘commands’.
The verb can also simply mean to pass on or direct a message. That is how I understand it here, because we do not live under the Law, and we have not received ‘commands’ in the heavy, legal sense. We live in liberty; and where the apostle speaks of ‘commandments’ which he gave, he is speaking of the things he set before them as what is expected of believers.
Our word ‘to endorse’ actually comes closer to the tone here. These are guidelines, instructions, teaching. Terms such as ‘commandments’ and ‘law’ in Scripture often have the basic sense of instruction. It may be very binding, but does not have to be. Usually it is God’s teaching.

Some people quote Psalm 119 to prove that we still live under the Law, because it so often says 'thy commandments …'. But we should realise that this is not talking about 'the ten commandments' as a legal code in isolation, but about God's instruction generally. That becomes clear when we read the synonyms in Psalm 119 alongside each other: 'thy law, thy commandments, thy testimonies, thy statutes, thy word, thy judgments, thy way, thy precepts, thy truth, thy light' – it is all the broad instruction from God. He gives us the 'law-like structure', the principles of how things truly are; that is His teaching. He is essentially saying: This is simply how it is.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 – 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification…'

> For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

The essence of sanctification is not that we should become 'nicer' people, or live more neatly, or become better members of society or of the local church. That is not the point. Sanctification in Scripture means in practice: that which is sanctified is set apart to the service of God.

To be sanctified is to be in union with God. Humanity is, by nature, cut off from God and must be reconciled to Him. Those 'two parties' must be brought together; that could be described metaphorically as being sanctified' – 'making whole'.

More specifically, sanctification means being devoted to the service of God. The natural man serves 'the god of this world':

> 2 Corinthians 4:4
> In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not
> John 12:31
> Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

Thus man is useless to God. But in our redemption we are delivered out of this present evil world and joined to the living God, in order to serve Him:

> Galatians 1:4
> Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

So 'sanctification' means separation from the world and dedication to the service of God. If you look up all the words 'holy, sanctify, sanctification, sanctified', the pattern becomes clear.

For instance, the sons of Aaron were to be sanctified when the LORD filled their hands, that is, gave them tasks to perform in His service (Exodus 28–29). They were sanctified by God because of a charge, a responsibility, a gift.

Sanctification is therefore placing something or someone into a different position. When children are sanctified in their believing parents, they are placed in a privileged position, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:

> 1 Corinthians 7:14
> For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

Children of believing parents are, by nature, like all other children. But there is something different about them: by the fact that they are children at all, and that they are children of believers who belong to the Church, they share in the position of their parents. They are therefore considered to belong to the Church. Their 'sanctification'

refers to their legal position, which they have as minors under the authority of their sanctified parents. For that reason the children are also called ‘holy’.
Likewise, everything that might in itself be unclean, and which we, as believers, receive and use, is sanctified in this way, so that it becomes profitable to us. Paul writes to Timothy:

> 1 Timothy 4:4–5
> For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: 5 For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

We are children of God; therefore ‘every creature of God’ – His creation – can, in that relationship, be made useful for God and thus sanctified. The objects sanctified for use in the tabernacle or the temple did not change in themselves. They became ‘holy things’ because they were placed in a particular position and service.
Our sanctification is nothing other than our dedication to the service of the Lord. So far as it is a process, it concerns the sanctification of our manner of life, which more and more is directed towards serving the Lord.
The idea is that we, as children of God who have received the life of Christ, are holy in ourselves already. That is why the New Testament letters are addressed ‘to the saints’. We cannot then be sanctified again as to our inner man. But we still live in our body. In one sense the body is holy, because it is presented to God for His service (Romans 12:1). On the other hand, sin still dwells in this body, and that aspect is obviously not sanctified.
Our body will be sanctified when it is changed, at the rapture of the Church:

> Romans 8:23
> And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

So, briefly:

1. We are holy on the basis of the past – that concerns the spirit, our state, our position.
2. We are being made holy now – that concerns the soul, our walk, our practical life.

We shall be holy in the future – that concerns the body, which awaits its transformation.
In Scripture, these are viewed together as one whole:

> Philippians 1:6
> Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

The ‘sanctification of the body’ flows out of the sanctification of the walk (soul), and that in turn flows out of the sanctification of the spirit, the inward man. Peter cites the Old Testament when he says we are to be holy in all our manner of life:

> 1 Peter 1:15
> But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

So we are to become holy in practice; and the final outcome of that is again the sanctification (that is, glorification) of the body, in the sense of its change into a glorified body. The biblical thought is that the glorification of the body is, in some way, in proportion to the sanctification of the walk. That is also the connection in 1 Thessalonians.

Our body is therefore fundamentally regarded as holy, because it is placed in that position of service to the Lord. This is what is meant by:

> Titus 3:5–6
> Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

We believe, in the practical life, 'unto the salvation of [our] souls':
We believe, in the practical day–to–day life of faith, 'unto the salvation of [our] souls' (that is 1 Peter 1:9), and beyond that we look forward to:

> Philippians 3:21
> Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

That lies in the future. Yet even now we already have a share in a glorified Christ, because we are children of God. Whether, in this life, we actually come to share in that glory in such a way that it works out visibly in our bodies, depends on our manner of life. To the extent that this glory is worked out in us now, to that same degree we shall, in the future, receive a glorified body.
As our faith grows, as we are found faithful, in that measure we share in the sanctification which the Spirit works in us – for that is what 'sanctification of the Spirit' means. It also means that in our practical walk we should not remain in sin. We should not serve sin, but righteousness. That is Paul's reasoning in Romans 6, where he begins:

> Romans 6:1
> What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

And then:

> Romans 6:13
> Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Where we do this, it leads to a settled conclusion, a statement of fact. Not a bare command, but a logical consequence:

> Romans 6:19 (last part)
> … so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

And then:

> Romans 6:14
> For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Serving righteousness does not mean that sin no longer works in us. Scripture does not say that. It does say that sin will no longer be the dominant power in our lives – it will 'not have dominion' – because we are 'under grace'. That also means that sin does exercise dominion where we place ourselves 'under the law'.
To be 'servants to righteousness' (Romans 6:19) has a sanctifying effect upon our whole life and produces fruit:

> Romans 6:22
> But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

Formerly we were ‘servants of sin’ (verse 20), slaves of sin. We were strangers and without God (Ephesians 2:12,19). Now we have been ‘made free from sin’ and ‘become servants to God’. That, in practice, is sanctification. And that is the real subject of the epistle. Even though the statements about the coming of Christ and all that connects with it are the most striking parts of this letter, the central theme is:
‘Your sanctification’ –
‘For this is the will of God, even your sanctification …’ (1 Thessalonians 4:3)
…and again in verse 7:

> 1 Thessalonians 4:7
> For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

In verse 3 this sanctification is immediately linked with:
‘… that ye should abstain from fornication.’
The word ‘fornication’ in Scripture is seldom used in the narrow, purely physical sense. First and foremost it refers to idolatry, unfaithfulness, as becomes clear if you place the many passages side by side. Especially, it refers to being unfaithful to the Lord whom we ought to serve – and that means serving something or someone else. That is idolatry.
So also in this verse. It is a misunderstanding if one thinks that sanctification has only, or mainly, to do with our sexual conduct. Although everything in our life is included in sanctification, we should not reduce sanctification to that one area. That is often done, and then based on this verse, reading ‘fornication’ only in its lowest application.
We should not do that. The issue is unfaithfulness to the Lord. Israel as an ‘adulterous generation’ (Matthew 12:39) is not a comment on their sexual life, but on their religious life. They served other gods. That is unfaithfulness, that is fornication, that is idolatry. Fornication is the opposite of faith. Faith is fidelity; fornication is unfaithfulness, and thus unbelief.

> **1 Thessalonians 4:4**
> That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;

‘Our vessel’ is our body. The word first means a bowl, a pot, a cup, and so on. A vessel is hollow – it is meant to contain something, and to be used for a purpose. Vessels are among the most basic household items which a person uses. The term is then extended to all kinds of tools, things used by a person. In that sense, man himself is such a vessel, such a tool.
Sometimes the term is used almost literally as an image: then we ourselves are vessels – large or small – which are to be filled. That means, in practice, that we are to be used for some purpose.

> 2 Timothy 2:20–21
> But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

Vessels ‘unto honour’ stand in the kitchen or the living room; vessels ‘unto dishonour’ stand by the latrine. The point is: some things are for honourable use, others for less honourable use. The thought is that we should be vessels unto honour, and separate ourselves from the uses that are dishonourable. It is, of course, image–language. We are to be ‘prepared unto every good work’. We are such vessels.

We each have a vessel – our body has been entrusted to us. As long as the vessel is here, it should be filled with honourable things: with a treasure, or with water – the picture of the Word of God.

> John 2:7
> Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

Then that water is changed into wine. This change is the Lord's work. The Word is changed into experience of eternal life. So the vessel is to be filled with wine. It can also be filled with oil, a picture of the Spirit. All these images come to the same thing.
We possess the vessel, but it belongs to the Lord. Nevertheless, we are responsible for it. 'In sanctification and honour' means: it is to be used in an honourable way, in general – we would say: decently, respectably.

> **1 Thessalonians 4:5**
> Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

What is it not? Not 'in the lust of concupiscence'. Our translators added 'lust of' ('beastly desire') to make sure we understand it is evil, but the text itself simply speaks of 'the passion of lust'.
The word for 'passion' (or 'motion') appears elsewhere, for instance in the phrase 'motions of sins'. A 'motion' is an inner impulse – we could say 'motive'. A locomotive moves itself. A motive is an inner drive. It is also related to 'emotion' – literally a movement within. That is what 'passion' is here: that which drives us, that which stirs within the heart, that which moves us.
So Paul is speaking of the emotions of desire, for lust is indeed an emotion. Today, people usually call it 'feeling', as if it were merely a kind of perception. But feelings are not perceptions; they arise in ourselves. Many people then equate that with 'the heart' or 'the mind', as though it were all one thing.
I notice that, when people talk about the Bible or church matters, they talk about emotion – about what a text does to them, what it 'triggers' in them. And inwardly I think: it matters little what it triggers or what it does in that sense. The first question is: is it the truth or not? Truth is not decided by emotion. If your emotions lie on the surface, you will never arrive at the truth.
Serving the Lord 'in sincerity' does, of course, come from within – but it has no value at all if it is not sustained and fed by the Word of God, which first came to us from outside. People often skip that step and start directly from what is in their hearts, and that must somehow come out.
'I feel, I think, I experience' is not wrong in itself, as long as it proceeds from a heart that is filled with the Word of God. That is the point. Only then does it have value for God and for us. If the Word is not inside, all you have is 'motions of lust', corrupt emotions. Lust is still the respectable end of that spectrum; far stranger things spring from the heart of man.

> Matthew 15:18–19
> But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

That is not of much worth.

‘Gentiles’ are ‘those which know not God’, as the end of verse 5 says. By definition, Gentiles are those who do not know God – unless the context is contrasting Jews and Gentiles, where ‘Jews’ are those reckoned to know God, and Gentiles those who are reckoned not to know Him. We have become children of God, but we were Gentiles. This ‘lust’ – the striving of the natural man to seize and possess things for himself – is not the Lord’s way. We are to give, as the Lord does. With Him it is not a matter of grabbing what there is to grab, using whatever can be used. On the contrary, He gives, ‘for his great love wherewith he loved us’. That is what we should do; and for that He supplies all that we need.

1 Thessalonians 4:6

That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

We are all children of God and belong to one and the same family. We should behave towards one another accordingly. The fact that the Lord has forgiven our sins does not give us the right to cheat one another with impunity, to ‘go beyond and defraud’ one another.

Here it says, ‘the Lord is the avenger of all such.’ If brethren do us wrong, they will be judged for it – and the other way round as well. We should be fully aware of this. We ought to serve one another, as the Lord serves us.

The whole First Epistle of John is essentially about nothing else: that we should love the brethren. That is the will of God, and that is what sanctification is.

1 Thessalonians 4:7

For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

There is endless discussion about ‘calling’ and ‘election’. We, as believers, are chosen and we have part in the heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1). But we are also chosen, or called, unto sanctification, to the service of God, in our whole life.

1 Thessalonians 4:8

He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

The thought is that the will of God is our sanctification. By giving us His power – His Spirit – He enables that sanctification. If someone rejects this, if someone turns away from the service of God, he is not rejecting a mere man, but God Himself. If a believer rejects God, he is guilty of the ‘fornication’ of verse 3 – unfaithfulness to his calling, that is, to his election.

1 Thessalonians 4:9–10

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. 10 And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

The apostle says that he has seen that brotherly love among them. It is therefore not really necessary to write about it – and that matches the long description in chapters 1 and 2. It is that love which expresses the unity of believers, and that was evident among the Thessalonians.

Paul says, in effect: you do not need this, yet I will write it once more – 'that ye increase more and more'. And that is what we should aim at too: to abound in brotherly love.

> **1 Thessalonians 4:11–12**
> And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; 12 That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

It is the same word as in:

> Ephesians 4:3
> Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We are to be active, eager, in keeping 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' – with zeal, with perseverance, with full dedication. Yet here in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, this strong word is used in a seemingly opposite way: 'that ye study to be quiet'. That is: make it your aim to be quiet, to hold back, to be temperate. Titus 2:12 uses the same idea: 'that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world'.
In other words: Remain calm, namely by doing your own business. Zeal is good, provided it does not degenerate into meddling with other people's affairs.
We are to 'do [our] own business', and 'work with [our] own hands'. There are people who are always busy delegating: 'You do this, you do that, do it this way, not that way.' A large part of modern preaching is little more than that – people being told what they must do and what they must not do. We are driven and pushed, not only from the pulpit but through all sorts of Christian organisations: 'We must do this, we must do that.'
Yes, we are to be active – but in our own work, 'with [our] own hands'. We should do it ourselves, in our own lives, not live other people's lives for them. If everyone truly did that, things would go well enough.

> 1 Peter 4:15
> But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

A 'busybody in other men's matters' is placed on the same line as 'a murderer, or thief, or evildoer'. A murderer interferes with someone else's life – he literally steals it. A thief interferes with another man's property, his affairs – just as an evildoer does. It is all outward–directed. But Peter adds: 'or as a busybody in other men's matters.' Other people's affairs, including their own character and way of being, are not our business. We are not to suffer for that.
What we all have to learn, as human beings, is that we must live our own life and bear responsibility for the decisions we ourselves take. We must stand by those decisions. That makes us adults. As far as we have problems in life, we must make our own choices, take our own decisions, and pursue them 100%. Live our own life, put it in order, and only then – not earlier – can we be a support and a blessing to others.
What helps others most is, firstly, that we are not a burden to them, and secondly, that we have something to offer them. That is where our focus should be. Out of that inner order we may become an example to others.
So we should 'be quiet', 'do [our] own business', 'use [our] own gifts' – as Romans 12:7 says – and know our own responsibility. 1 Corinthians 12 explains at length that believers have different gifts (abilities), and thus different responsibilities. If people with different gifts all meddle with one another's work, nothing will come of it. Therefore each should do his own work.

All believers should ‘walk honestly [decently, honourably] toward them that are without’ – those who do not belong to the Church, unbelievers, ‘them that are without’. We should be aware that others depend on us; that is Scriptural. We are to do our own work as Christians, in the ministry entrusted to us, with an eye to honour. That is to ‘walk honestly toward them that are without’, and to ‘have lack of nothing’ – not to be constantly dependent, but able, by the Lord’s grace, also to give.
From verse 13 onward, Paul comes to the main subject of the letter. This call to sanctification flows into verse 13 and the statements, in general, about the coming of Christ, and in particular about the rapture of the Church. This is perhaps the best–known, and maybe also the most disputed, passage in the epistle.
It is not so much a fresh announcement of the coming of Christ itself, but of the way in which what the Old Testament already foretold will take place – namely, that the LORD, the Messiah, will appear. To that is now added the specific question: what place does the Church have in that? The place the Church has afterwards – sharing in the reign of Christ – is taught in all the New Testament letters. Here it is especially made clear how that connection is made. Not only concerning those ‘which are asleep’, but first of all concerning ‘we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord’ (verse 15).

> **1 Thessalonians 4:13–14**
> But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

In my Bible, the heading over verse 13 says ‘Concerning the coming of Christ’ – and I am quite pleased with that. I am also glad that there is no new heading above chapter 5:1. Traditionally this whole section – from 4:13 through to verse 10 or 11 in chapter 5 – has been treated as one unit. It all speaks of the coming of Christ and what is connected with it, especially the Church’s position in that whole event.
Some read verse 13 as though the Thessalonians knew nothing at all about these things. That is a misunderstanding.
From the content of this letter – from the earlier chapters and also from chapter 5 – it is clear that they were not ignorant. They apparently knew more of the prophetic word than the average evangelical believer today.
The strongest evidence is in chapter 5, verses 1 and 2 – we will look at that later. In any case, the Thessalonians knew that the Lord Jesus would come to deliver them from the wrath to come:

> 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10
> For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; 10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

It seems clear enough that the Thessalonians were aware of these things. In Thessalonica, and also in all the other assemblies, they themselves proclaimed that they were waiting ‘for his Son from heaven … which delivered us from the wrath to come’. Whether they knew how that deliverance would take place, we cannot say exactly. But it certainly means they were far from ignorant.

Personally, I am strongly inclined to think that Paul had discussed all these things with them and that he is now simply putting it in writing, not so much for the Thessalonians themselves, as for us. In 4:15 he reminds them of what they had already heard in his preaching. The fact that something has been faithfully preached does not mean it never needs to be written down.

So, as 'brethren' – believers in Christ – we are not to be ignorant 'concerning them which are asleep'. We are not to sorrow like others 'which have no hope', because they are not 'brethren'. Those who 'sleep' shall rise again – bodily, of course. As believers, they had already, while alive on earth, been raised with Christ, indeed:

> Ephesians 2:6
> And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

They were already, in Christ, 'set in the heavenlies'.

Heaven is the unseen realm. As believers we already now, together with Christ, have a position there, even though it remains the invisible world to us.

It is very important to see that the whole passage here from verse 13, right through to verse 11 of chapter 5, is reasoning against the backdrop of the Old Testament expectation of the Messiah's coming – namely that He would one day come to establish His Kingdom, and that it was a sad thing if you had died before that time. When the Kingdom comes, you must still be alive to enter it, otherwise you gain nothing from that Kingdom.

I am speaking, of course, about the thousand years, the 'Kingdom of Christ' which will be realised on this old earth, in this old creation. Besides that, it is true that on 'the last day' all Old Testament believers will in any case be raised in order to enter that earthly Kingdom, which by that point will already have existed for more than a thousand years. That Kingdom began at the resurrection of Christ, at the crowning of the King. Wherever there is a king, in biblical terms, there is a kingdom.

The common Old Testament expectation was therefore that believing dead would be raised at the last day. Martha therefore says, after the death of Lazarus:

> John 11:24
> Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

And to Daniel it was said:

> Daniel 12:13
> But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.

So it was entirely natural that the first Christians, who stood so close to Old Testament times, thought that they too would rise at the last day. What they did not yet realise was that they belong to 'the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven' (Hebrews 12:23), and therefore have a special place – a heavenly destiny – not at the last day, but much earlier, before He will reveal His Kingdom upon the earth.

If a believer in this present (fifth) dispensation dies, he does not 'go to heaven'. That is never stated in Scripture. He cannot go there for the simple reason that he was already there. We only leave the earth, this visible world. We do not 'travel' into an invisible world; we were always already part of that unseen reality.

Scripture never says that we go to heaven; rather, it says that we are already there, and that we belong to a world we do not see, but which is nonetheless entirely real. Our walk, our citizenship, is in heaven:

> Philippians 3:20
> For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

These words in 1 Thessalonians 4 are therefore written against the background of what the Bible itself has already taught, and not against the background of later (un)Christian misunderstandings. To understand them, we must read them within that biblical context.

Then we see why believers might be sorrowful 'concerning them which are asleep' – those who have died as believers. They would have been thinking: Sadly, they have died before the Kingdom has come.

Against that background Paul writes that he does not want them to be ignorant about this matter, and he says:

> **1 Thessalonians 4:14**
> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

If we believe that 'Jesus died and rose again', then we should also believe that God will 'bring with him' those who have 'fallen asleep'.

Personally, I would place the comma differently here: 'them also which sleep, in Jesus, will God bring with him' – in line with the Greek construction and with Paul's usual terminology. He always speaks of believers as being 'in Christ', not 'in Jesus'. 'In Christ' belongs to the subject Paul is dealing with here. The sense is:

that God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Christ.

God will give the believers who have fallen asleep a share in the same bodily resurrection by which the grave is left behind – that is, left empty – and the resurrected receive a glorified body.

The idea is that God raised the Lord Jesus, and in the same way He will also raise the believers of the time after Christ's resurrection. For the simple reason that the Lord Jesus is called:

> Romans 8:29
> ...the firstborn among many brethren.

and:

> 1 Corinthians 15:20
> But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His resurrection, is the Head of the Church, and we have become 'planted together' with Him:

> Romans 6:5
> For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

On that ground we also receive a share in His resurrection – bodily as well. We already have a share in His resurrection, but not yet in its bodily side. More precisely: we already share bodily in the resurrection life of Christ (His life is in our bodies), but we do not yet share in the bodily form of His resurrection (our bodies are not yet glorified).

Romans 8:9–11

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

In our mortal bodies the resurrection life of Christ dwells, 'by his Spirit'. If the life of Christ is in us, then we share in the resurrection life of Christ, and there is already a bodily aspect to that – our present bodies are quickened – even though we do not yet share in the bodily form of His resurrection.

The fact that our mortal bodies have been made alive with Christ guarantees that they themselves will one day also be changed:

Philippians 3:21

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

There is still something lacking in our salvation. Our bodies are not yet conformed to His glorious body. That is still awaited.

1 Thessalonians 4 speaks purely about this bodily resurrection, and nothing else – just as 1 Corinthians 15 does, where the 'rapture of the Church' is also treated at length. The focus in both chapters is the bodily resurrection, as the context clearly shows. That does not take away from the fact that we have long since shared in the resurrection life of Christ in heaven.

The question then is: what about the believers who are already in heaven and yet are also 'dead' as far as this earthly life is concerned?

The rapture is often pictured very graphically: we are here, and then, all together, we are taken upwards. But believers who have died are already 'with the Lord'; yet, so it is then said, on the day of the rapture they would again take part in a movement from earth to heaven. But they were already there! Do they come back down first?

Some therefore think that they are not currently with the Lord, because this passage speaks of them as waiting for resurrection and the rapture. Others again say that the dead do not take part in the rapture – which is equally wrong. That belongs to the so–called doctrine of soul sleep, which is popular in some circles but is not correct.

In the unseen realm, awaiting the bodily resurrection of the entire Church (2 Corinthians 5), the departed are indeed waiting for the future – and in this context, the future in view is the rapture of the Church, our appearing before 'the judgment seat of Christ':

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Scripture tells us nothing more about that interim condition: being with Christ in heaven, awaiting the future.

When an unbeliever dies – whether in Old Testament or New Testament times – he is not immediately thrown into the 'lake of fire'. Biblically, it is simple: he waits in Hades, the place of the dead, for 'the day of judgment', 'the last day'. So there too we are dealing with a time of waiting.

Because some think: ‘It would be dreadfully boring to have to wait so long,’ people have invented the notion that the dead are sleeping during that time and notice nothing. That is where the doctrine of soul sleep comes from.

12 bullet point summary of the easily misunderstood passages

(1 Thes. 4:15–17)

Continue

7. Clouds symbolize the future revelation with Christ, not literal weather.
Clouds = imagery of glory and visible manifestation at His return (cf. Acts 1, Rev. 1).
The Church joins Christ so as to appear with Him in glory.

8. The 'archangel's voice' refers to Christ Himself.
- 'Angel' means messenger.
- The 'angel of the LORD' in the Old Testament is God Himself.
- Therefore, the archangel = Christ.
- 'Michael' is another title for Christ.

Thus:
The shout, the voice, and the trumpet belong to Christ.

9. The rapture precedes the tribulation.
Isaiah 57:1–2 is interpreted as:
- The righteous being 'taken away' before evil comes.
- The world notices but does not spiritually respond.

This is used to defend a pre-tribulation rapture.

10. The glorified body is a transformed continuation, not a replacement.
Like the resurrection body of Jesus:
- The believer's earthly body is changed, not discarded.
- Identity is preserved.
- The change is instantaneous (1 Cor.15:52).

Illustrations: evaporation, caterpillar to butterfly.

11. After glorification, believers differ in reward and glory.
- All believers have a glorified body,
- but receive different degrees of glory ('clothing'),
- based on faithfulness and work done in the body.

This correlates to the judgment seat of Christ.

12. The Church participates in Christ's rule and ministry.
During the Messianic kingdom:
- Glorified believers will appear and serve on earth,
- As angels minister now,

Particularly toward Israel and God's purposes

1. Paul is conveying a direct revelation from the Lord.
When Paul says, 'by the word of the Lord', the writer argues that:

- Paul is not quoting the Old Testament.
- Rather, he is communicating a personal revelation given directly by Christ.

2. 'Those who are asleep' = believers who have died.
The text compares death to sleep—just as Jesus spoke of Lazarus.

- 'Sleep' means absence from earthly awareness, but not unconsciousness.
- Believers who have died continue to exist and will later receive glorified bodies.

3. Dead believers and living believers are all waiting.
Both groups—those who have died and those still alive—await the moment when Christ glorifies His Church.

4. The 'rapture' is a sudden transformation, not slow lifting.
The word caught up (harpazō) means:

- 'to seize, snatch away with power,'
- not gently floating upward.
  This act is connected with Christ's power to subdue all things (Phil. 3:21).

5. Believers do not receive their final glorified body until this event.
Those already with Christ in heaven:

- have some form of heavenly existence,
- but still wait for their final glorified body at the same moment as those alive.

Death removes earthly limitations, but glorification happens at the rapture.

6. Paul's order in 1 Thessalonians 4 is not chronologically in time.
The text lists:

1. The Lord descends
2. The dead rise
3. The living are caught up

But the author claims the true time-order is:

1. The dead in Christ rise first
2. The living in Christ are transformed and caught up with them
3. Then they meet the Lord in the air
4. Only afterward does the Lord descend fully in His Second Coming

Reason: We meet Christ 'in the air,' meaning His final descent to earth is later on the 'day of the Lord

Paul reveals that at Christ's coming, believers who have died will be raised and glorified first, then living believers will be instantly transformed, and together they will meet Christ—receiving reward, glory, and final bodies in preparation to appear with Him in His future kingdom.

1 Thessalonians 4:15
For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

‘By the word of the Lord’ – here refers to what’s already written in Scriptures, for instance in the Old Testament. But where, in the Old Testament, do we find precisely what is meant? We do not.
I therefore keep to what the Greek actually expresses: ‘by a word of the Lord’ – that is, by a specific word given personally to him by the Lord. It indicates that the Lord Himself spoke to Paul and revealed this truth to him.
‘Those which are asleep’ simply means those who have died. Such a one is said to have ‘fallen asleep’. The term ‘sleep’ for death is used by the Lord Jesus, in connection with Lazarus:

> John 11:11
> These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

The point is: while someone sleeps, he has no awareness of the circumstances in which he was while awake. He has no knowledge of earthly things, of the visible world. It is in that sense that ‘sleep’ is sometimes used for believers who have died.
But to say from that that they are unconscious is a step too far. Is a person who sleeps conscious or not? In any case he dreams in his sleep. And it is written:

> Psalm 127:2
> It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.

Who can begin to guess what God gives ‘his beloved’ in their sleep? The simple point is this: when a believer dies here, he then, as it were, opens his eyes in the unseen world. He is then ‘loosed’:

> Philippians 1:23
> For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

Loosed from the limitations – including the limitations of sight – of the earthly, physical body. And then such a one appears to be where he always truly was: in heaven. There too he must still wait, but he was already waiting here on earth. It was, and remains, a waiting for the moment when we shall receive our final, glorified body.
Thus those who sleep, together with those who are alive and remain, are all waiting for what we call ‘the rapture of the Church’. That is not about ‘a great relocation’, but only about a change. And that is exactly how it is expressed elsewhere.
The word ‘caught up’ often gives the impression of a slow lifting or drawing upwards, but that is not what the word means. It literally means ‘to seize, to snatch away’ – ‘to take away with power’.
In Philippians 3 this is called:
‘…according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.’ (Philippians 3:21)
It is the same word for powerful working.
As far as I understand it, the same applies to those who ‘have fallen asleep’, who are in heaven and no longer present here on earth. They too are waiting for the moment – in whatever form their present ‘body’ may be – when they will receive a body that is ‘fashioned like unto his glorious body’.
Our expectation is that we shall be glorified together with Him. We are to be heirs of God, and share in the glory of Christ and in His Kingdom. We shall be, as this passage

also implies, set as sons of God, and thus as firstborn; and with firstborn–status comes an inheritance, received before the judgment seat of Christ.
Our appearing before the judgment seat of Christ corresponds to what we call 'the rapture of the Church'. Strictly speaking they are distinguishable, but in reality they belong to one and the same complex of events. They coincide. We are snatched away from here, and we receive our reward.
Those who were already 'there' (i.e. who were no longer here on earth) also receive their reward at that occasion – that is, glory.
About this event it is said that it happens in an instant, 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye', even though we – as time–bound people – cannot really comprehend how that can be:

> 1 Corinthians 15:52
> In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

First comes the rapture of the Church, and then our appearing before the judgment seat of Christ. In Scripture this is one united hope for believers: that we shall be glorified with Christ. That is the outcome of the rapture of the Church and the manifestation at the judgment seat. They can be viewed, "in a moment'', as one single event: we receive our reward.
That means we are delivered, so far as necessary, from our earthly body, and immediately receive a glorified body. Those who were already 'with the Lord' had a heavenly body in a general sense; they too will, at that point, receive a final, glorified body.

> 2 Corinthians 5:1–4
> For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

In these verses Paul is speaking of reward, which we shall receive, in continuation of:

> 2 Corinthians 4:17
> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

That reward is indeed related to the body we shall receive, but it is not quite the same thing. Paul says: we shall be with the Lord, the body will be changed, but there is also clothing for that body. This is, without doubt, a picture – but I gladly hold to it, because in that way everyone can understand it, and it is 100% biblical.
We shall receive clothing for the glorified body. Some will receive a little, some much, and there will be those who receive none, who will 'be found naked'. So one may be 'clothed with glory', and that is more than simply having a heavenly body.
Personally, I am inclined to think – in connection with other passages – that when Paul speaks about:
'our earthly house of this tabernacle' being 'dissolved' (verse 1),
he is not only thinking of physical death, but also of the rapture of the Church. Paul expects to remain alive until the rapture, and in that event we too lay aside this earthly

tabernacle. Then follows clothing and over–clothing, which is directly connected with our manifestation before the judgment seat of Christ.
If you read verse 10 straight after verse 1, this 'dissolving' of our earthly house is directly linked with our appearing at the judgment seat:

> 2 Corinthians 5:1, 10
> For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

> **1 Thessalonians 4:16**
> For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

'The Lord himself shall descend from heaven.' That is an echo of Old Testament prophecy. If there is one great event for which such language is used, it is the moment at the end of 'the seventieth week of Daniel', when the Messiah comes and His feet stand upon the Mount of Olives:
Zechariah 14:4
And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives…
When we speak of the second coming of Christ, it is that event we mean – not the rapture of the Church. That is, of course, quite a different thing from the Lord Himself descending.
According to the description here, this descent is accompanied by sound.
The question then is: who makes this sound? It remains symbolic language, even if an actual audible sound were involved. Three 'voices' are mentioned:

1. The Lord himself – with a shout
2. The archangel – with a voice
3. God – with the trump of God

The whole idea is that of a great proclamation, a powerful public announcement. When the trumpet sounds, it is connected with the activity of the king. The trumpet is blown when someone is made king, and also when people are summoned to come to the king in time of war, to gather around him and place themselves at his disposal.
That is the ultimate picture when the trumpet sounds: when the final King, the Messiah, appears, the trumpet is blown, so to speak. In practice that is a ram's horn, and when the horn is blown, you hear the sound of the ram. The blowing of the horn is at the same time a picture of resurrection: the horn – a symbol of kingship – is filled with new life. The true 'horn of plenty' or 'horn of salvation' is the resurrection. To 'breathe' into something is always, in Scripture, to impart life:

> Genesis 2:7
> And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

The sound of the 'trump of God' is the voice of Christ. The Lord is God, and He will speak with power, for 'a shout' is 'to speak with a mighty voice'. When the invisible God speaks, the Lord always appears in view. He is the expression, the visible manifestation, of the being of God. Whether we say God speaks, or Christ speaks, there is in truth no difference; we know Who the Lord is, and we know Who God is.

Logically, then, the archangel must also be the Lord, God Himself.
Our word ‘angel’ means simply ‘messenger’. The translators apparently found that too plain and so they left the Greek word ‘angelos’ largely untranslated, only slightly adapted. ‘Arch’ was likewise left untranslated and later rendered ‘arch–’, giving us ‘archangel’. But who is the messenger of God?

> John 1:18
> No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

Who is the Word of God? That is Jehovah. He is the Messenger, as is also clear in:

> Zechariah 3:1–2
> 1 And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.2 And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?

When God speaks, it is always ‘the LORD’ (Jehovah). He is therefore the Angel par excellence – and thus the Archangel.
Later, in Hebrews 1, it is said of ‘the Son’…

> Hebrews 1:1–5
> God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.5 For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

The Greek word archangelos (‘archangel’) is not actually translated; it is simply carried over. It only ever appears in the singular. There is no such thing in Scripture as ‘archangels’ (plural). You only find one. That is inevitable, because archangel means ‘chief angel’, or ‘first angel’.
The highest Angel in the Bible is called ‘the angel of the LORD’, who appears many times in the Old Testament. It becomes clear that He is the Angel – namely, the LORD (Jehovah) Himself.
The expression ‘the angel of the LORD’ should be read as ‘the angel, namely the LORD’. Or, if you do not translate the divine Name, it would be ‘the Angel Jehovah’. Then we know exactly who He is. Because that is a Name of Deity, people sometimes feel uneasy with that expression, but it is widely recognised that this Angel is no one other than the Lord Himself.
Christ Himself is the Angel, the Messenger of God, and He is set above all the angels. He is Himself an Angel (a Messenger) and stands at the head of the angels. He is therefore, by definition, the Archangel.
In Daniel 10 and 12 we meet this Angel for the first time under the Name Michael. There He is not called Jehovah, but Michael. Scripture gives many names and titles to the Lord Jesus Christ; in my view, the Name Michael belongs among them, because it is evidently a Name of the Lord Himself.

Daniel 12:1

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.

Michael is Daniel's 'prince'. He stands over Daniel and thus over Israel. Michael, as Angel, is understood to be the Prince of Israel.

Here the subject is 'a time of trouble' for the Jewish people – the same as the 'great tribulation' referred to by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24. In that time Michael shall 'stand up' in order to deliver the people. With the standing up of Michael the great tribulation comes to an end. That is at the earliest at the end of the seventieth week of Daniel. And when will the Lord descend? Precisely at the end of that seventieth week. And who is it that stands up then? Michael – to sound the trumpet, as it were.

The next time in Scripture that we read of the archangel, He is not called Michael, but simply 'the archangel' – that is, the Lord Himself – in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. In Jude verse 9 the two expressions are brought together: the Name Michael and the noun 'archangel'. Notice what is written:

Jude 9

Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

In our Old Testament books, you will search in vain for this particular story. There we do read that Moses died and that afterwards his grave was sought, but was not found:

Deuteronomy 34:5–6

So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD.6 And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

That body of Moses was raised and taken away by the Lord. That may sound like a bold conclusion taken merely from the Old Testament, but in the light of Jude 9 it is fully justified. The body of Moses had, in the end, to be snatched away from the power of death, and therefore from 'him that had the power of death, that is, the devil':

Hebrews 2:14

...that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

Moses appears together with the Lord Jesus on the mount of transfiguration (Mark 9). There is another man present there who also had no grave: Elijah, who was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire. Scripture records these facts because they have prophetic significance. The ministry of both Moses and Elijah on this earth is not yet finished. That is why they appear with the glorified Christ on the mount of transfiguration. In the future, after the rapture of the Church, these two witnesses will preach for three and a half years in Jerusalem (Revelation 11).

In Daniel the name Michael alone is used; in 1 Thessalonians we only find 'archangel'; but here, in Jude, we have 'Michael the archangel'. He thus appears as the highest Angel. He is Christ.

The last time Michael is mentioned is in Revelation 12:

Revelation 12:7

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

The point in 1 Thessalonians 4 is that this whole event is accompanied 'with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.' In other words: with a cry, with a voice, with a trumpet – namely of the Lord Himself. The thought is that from that moment, and certainly from then onwards, as it were the trumpet is sounding – all in symbolic language. From that time God's Word will be made known on earth with great power.

I say that carefully, because I mean it in a double sense. On the one hand it refers to the preaching of the Gospel to all nations; on the other hand it has to do with the fulfilment of such passages as Psalm 2, where it says:

Psalm 2:5

Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

That powerful Word of God is, on the one hand, life-giving – as is the Gospel, which is 'the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth' (Romans 1:16). On the other hand, that same powerful Word of God does indeed bring judgment upon the ungodly nations.

The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, and then it says: 'and the dead in Christ shall rise first.' Now it becomes apparently complicated; here is where misunderstandings arise. People assume that statements must always be recorded in the order in which they will happen, and that is not the case here. Things do not have to be listed in simple time–sequence; they can also be arranged according to importance. You can very profitably tell events 'backwards', and that can be extremely instructive. 'The dead in Christ shall rise first.' If I read the verse with more stress, I would emphasise the word first. I can take it one step further: I could translate the opening 'and' as 'but', which is perfectly legitimate, so that the thought becomes: the Lord shall indeed descend, but first…

In English (and in Hebrew) the same little word can function as 'and', 'but', 'namely', 'also', and so on; our translation has to decide the nuance. So now a sequence emerges: 'first' and 'then' (or 'afterward') in verse 17:

1 Thessalonians 4:17

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Set out schematically, we get this order in the text as it stands:

1. The Lord Himself shall descend
2. The dead in Christ
3. Those who are alive and remain

Three things are mentioned. The real question is: what actually happens first?

The order in which they are written is clear: first the Lord, then the dead in Christ, then the living who remain. But what is the order in which they actually occur? The event that is explicitly said to be first is: 'the dead in Christ shall rise first.'

I am not going to pull the Greek apart here to show that the words can be rearranged; we do not need to. In English you can shuffle word order without changing the meaning, only the emphasis. So, if I rearrange in the order of what actually takes place, we have:

1. First the dead in Christ shall rise

2. After that we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them (the dead in Christ) in the clouds
3. The Lord shall descend

In verse 17 we read: 'to meet the Lord in the air.' The sentence 'the Lord shall descend' therefore comes after this 'going to meet'. The descent is implied twice – in verse 16 and again in verse 17. Twice the order of events is suggested.

We also read that we shall be 'caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.' That does not mean that there will be heavy cloud cover on the day of the rapture into which we vanish. The point is that we shall return with Him in the clouds (compare Acts 1:9–11; Revelation 1:7). Hence 'to meet the Lord'. The clouds here are not primarily about the rapture as such, but about the appearing of Christ and His Church at the end of the seventieth week.

If we go to meet Him, then He has not yet fully descended. He will descend, but first, before that descent, we go to meet Him.

Who are the 'we'? The answer is: both those who have fallen asleep in Christ and those who are alive and remain up to that point – even though that last clause is not spelled out.

Why, then, are we presented with this slightly 'awkward' order: first this, then that, whilst the last event is described first? Because what is mentioned first gives us a fixed point. It allows us to place this event within the whole history of salvation. That first statement we know already: the Lord shall descend – and that is the key. After that we are told what place the Church has in relation to Christ in connection with His descent, that is, with His coming.

When that moment comes, the Lord does not appear alone, but with the Church, which is His Body. My father used to say: 'Wherever Scripture speaks about 'the Christ', the Messiah, it is about the Church as well, because the Church is His Body and belongs to Him.'

Someone might object: 'But it also says that the Messiah would suffer and die; surely that does not apply to the Church?' My answer would be: in the Old Testament those statements are not about 'the Messiah' as such, but about the Son of David, Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord Jesus. That suffering and death befell Him in order that He might become the Messiah. So they are not prophecies about 'the Messiah' in the abstract, but about Him who would be the Messiah – and now is.

We, however, are one with Him. We have a share in Christ; we are 'planted together' with Him (Romans 6:5). If the Lord Himself descends, then the Church descends with Him. Here the subject is virtually all believers of this present dispensation (apart from the two – Moses and Elijah – whom we have already discussed). We all have a share in Christ, and therefore before He begins to reveal Himself in glory – from His appearing on the Mount of Olives at the end of the seventieth week – we shall all go to meet Him, in order then to be manifested with Him in glory. For that purpose we go to meet Him first. That is: He is coming, and we go in order to return with Him in our future position and for the sake of our future task, for there will be work to do in relation to the earth after the rapture of the Church.

Just as in the Old Testament heavenly beings appeared on earth from time to time, so we also shall, on occasions, appear on earth.

Between the Church's going to meet the Lord and the Lord's actual descent lies a period of seven years. That is not stated here, of course. Peter tells us:

2 Peter 1:19–21

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

We are to compare the prophetic passages with one another. They lie alongside each other and explain each other, because they fill in details for one another. Here you do not read that the Mount of Olives will split; that is in Zechariah 14. You do not read about the seventieth week of Daniel here; for that you go to Daniel 9. You have to compare Scripture with Scripture to see how everything fits together.

Our future is not so much 'the rapture of the Church' in isolation, but our appearing in glory with Him when the Lord descends and sets His feet upon the Mount of Olives. That revealing of the Church remains and is eternal. On God's timetable the first step, as we see here, is the rapture.

There is much debate about the timing of the rapture: when does it take place? Some say: during the great tribulation. Others say: only at the end of the great tribulation. How do they arrive at that? Simply, because they can point to passages where it is at least implied that during the great tribulation there will be believers on earth who are preserved by God. From that it is concluded that the rapture cannot yet have taken place.

But that is a misunderstanding. In the days of the tribulation there will be believers on earth, and the intention is that, if they remain faithful to the Lord in that time, with all that this may cost them, they will be spared. I should add, though, that Scripture certainly speaks about martyrs in those days – believers 'which were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held' (Revelation 6:9). They receive a resurrection before the beginning of the thousand years so that they, together with the other believers, enter the Kingdom.

In general, however, the faithful in those days will in one way or another escape that tribulation, because the Lord Himself will preserve them. It is not just tribulation in life – that is always with us – but specifically the great tribulation, the outbreak of the wrath of God. Believers in that time will indeed escape it.

What, then, of the Church? The answer is that we are those who are already:
'blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ' (Ephesians 1:3),
and who have received a body like unto His – a glorified body. We have been made conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29; Philippians 3:21). We share in Him and therefore in the same heavenly ministry. That means that we too, at times, will appear and disappear for specific purposes.

We need to come back briefly to the phrase 'the dead in Christ shall rise first' (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Many find this difficult, because we usually think that those who have died in Christ are already in heaven with the Lord. And heaven, remember, reaches right down to the earth's surface. This always brings us into complex territory: if they are already there, why must they then first rise in order to go there?

Besides that, we who 'are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord' are already 'made… sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 2:6), and our citizenship is already in heaven (Philippians 3:20). So the same 'problem' applies to us as well.

In reality, it is not so complicated. The point is not that we will go up to heaven (even though the verses seem to suggest that picture). The real point is the change of our body:

> Philippians 3:21
> Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

The word 'change' can be taken in two ways. One is 'alter': to modify, to make different. The other – and this is very common in Scripture – is 'to exchange' or 'to transfer', that is, 'to place in a different position'. Sometimes the word is translated 'to change' in the sense of 'to swap'. Here in Philippians 3 the stress is on the result: that our body will be 'fashioned like unto his glorious body'. At the end, we have a glorified body, not a 'vile' or 'lowly' one any more.

So either our present body is replaced by another, or it is transformed so that it becomes different. In practice, those two need not be very different: our body is changed, transformed, translated. The English word translate is generally 'to transfer into a different state or sphere'.

The body which we have at the end is, on the one hand, another body, yet on the other hand it is still our own body. The identity of a body does not lie in how it looks, but in who lives in it. That is why we read that the Lord, after His resurrection, was not recognised outwardly at first, yet they knew in their hearts that it was truly He.

The point is that for those who are alive and remain, their lowly, earthly body is changed. It is not simply thrown away and replaced, as if we discarded it to receive a totally different body. The same body is changed and thus becomes 'another' body – in one sense – but still the same in another, because it is still we ourselves who inhabit it. It may look different; it is a metamorphosis – a change of form and condition, but also of nature. That is certainly what happens to those who are alive and remain.

Whatever picture we form of the rapture – or better, the 'snatching away' – of the Church, one thing is sure: nothing of our body is left behind here.

The 'garment in which we dwell' – not our clothes, but our body – is so changed that it is no longer normally observable to earthly eyes. As far as men on earth are concerned, we are gone. It has been translated into a heavenly body. It can be manifested and will then, at times, be revealed. We shall in any case be revealed with Christ, but that is, officially, at the earliest seven years after the rapture of the Church.

The great pattern remains, of course, the Lord Jesus Himself. From Him we learn that He had another Body after His resurrection, but not with the old one left behind. That old body was transformed into a new Body.

Creation itself provides illustrations. There are substances that spontaneously change from visible, tangible matter into what we call 'gas' – which simply means we no longer see or touch them, and sometimes cannot even smell them. It is a transition from one state to another. A block of ice, when heated, becomes water, and then slowly disappears. It evaporates. It is still the same water, but in a different 'form of appearance'. From earthly it becomes heavenly, we might say.

Another illustration – there are many, the egg being one – is the caterpillar and the butterfly. The caterpillar is thoroughly earthly, stuck to the leaf or the branch on which it crawls. Then it spins itself in, and looks as if it has died – like a little mummy. After a time the cocoon opens, and out comes a butterfly, which is of an entirely different order. It looks nothing like the caterpillar. Is it the same creature? I believe it is, with the same

identity. Some basic features remain, but not many. From the kind of caterpillar you can tell what kind of butterfly will emerge – and vice versa. Then the butterfly flies away into the wide heavens.
So it will be with our body. It will be changed:
'…according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself' (Philippians 3:21).
The whole creation will be replaced by a new one – not with the old discarded, but with the old translated into a new.

> Revelation 20:11
> And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

For the old heaven and the old earth, for the old creation, 'there was found no place'. They are simply no longer there. They are not left behind; they are changed. What exactly happens there, I do not know. How could I possibly know how earthly bodies are transformed into heavenly ones? But that it does happen is illustrated for us in this present visible world.
Since we are a Church of firstfruits, we know that this will happen to us first. And that will not happen slowly, but suddenly and swiftly (1 Corinthians 15:52).
God changes our body. Does God need that body? No, certainly not. If He did, we would be facing a serious problem – and He would as well. So He does not need it, but He chooses to do it. He changes the body, or what remains of it. The living are then gone, and so are those 'which are asleep'. The graves will then be empty. I do not read anywhere in Scripture of a resurrection without the grave being opened, so I conclude that it really will be like that – though not because it must be so, but because that is how Scripture presents it. It would be a clearly observable event, and it will be noticed.
In this connection we read:

> Isaiah 57:1
> The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.

This is a beautiful statement, undoubtedly referring to the rapture of the Church. 'The righteous perisheth' could be taken to mean that he dies, but that is not really the meaning of 'perish'. It is more like 'to go out of sight'. 'To go round the corner' has the sense of disappearing. That does not have to be by death. The righteous – singular – disappears, 'and no man layeth it to heart'. Then immediately a parallel sentence follows. What are called 'merciful men' – plural – correspond to 'the righteous' – singular. 'Are taken away' corresponds to 'perisheth'. And then: 'none considering' matches 'no man layeth it to heart'.
You really need to write the lines one under another to see it properly. This is synonymous parallelism. The righteous perishes; then in the plural they perish, they disappear, they are taken away. It is singular at first because it concerns the Church – or Christ. But since everything in the Old Testament that is spoken about Christ is likewise applicable to the whole Church, it can also be said in the plural, pointing to all the members of the Church: 'merciful men'.
'To take away' is a splendid synonym for what we call 'the rapture of the Church' – in English 'the rapture', where you can still hear the idea of 'snatching' or 'reaping'.
'Layeth it to heart' in practice means 'to believe it' (see Deuteronomy 30:1; Romans 10:10). Men do not lay it to heart; they learn no lesson from it; they do not come to faith

through it. In short, nobody pays real attention to it; it happens ‘without that there is anyone who regards it’. At least – practically no one. It is a way of speaking that means ‘hardly anyone’. If the proportion is small enough, we can say ‘no one’ or ‘nothing’.
We cannot exclude the possibility that someone may yet come to faith in second instance because of the rapture of the Church. But as a general rule, that is not what happens. It is therefore certainly not the case that people do not notice it. That is sometimes taught, but I find that rather naïve. In proportion to the total world population, perhaps the number who are ‘snatched away’ is not very large – but it will certainly be noticed.
The text says further that ‘the righteous is taken away from the evil to come’. That is a remarkable expression, in which it is implied, among other things, that the Church is taken away before ‘the great tribulation’, before that ‘evil’ comes. That this is so is also clear from the following verses:

> Isaiah 57:2–3
> He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.3 But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore.

‘He’ – singular – is ‘the righteous’; ‘they’ – plural – ‘shall rest in their beds’. Verse 3 then speaks of Israel, the unfaithful nation. There the great tribulation upon Israel is announced, but before that, the rapture of the Church has taken place.
From verse 1 it is evident that people do see it, they do perceive it, they observe that it happens, or has happened, but it does not in general lead to anyone’s conversion. It is noticed, but not taken to heart.
Scripture teaches that the believer already in this life is ‘made… sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ – as a firstfruit under the New Covenant. Then Scripture does not teach that glorification takes place at the moment a believer dies, but that glorification reaches its completion later, namely ‘in the day of Christ’, at the rapture of the Church, our manifestation before His judgement seat. All those theories that speculate about where believers are after their death and before the rapture can only arise because you cannot read anywhere in the Bible that, when a believer dies, he ‘goes to heaven’. And since it does not say so, people apparently feel free to invent their own notions.
Scripture does teach that when a believer dies, he is stripped of the earthly. Are those who have already died now in heaven without a body? That cannot be. They are in heaven, they certainly have a body – one that is more glorious than the earthly; that is called ‘glorious’. But I do not think that they are already ‘clothed’ or ‘overclothed’ with their final glory. That comes later.
We have an example in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He appeared in a body with superhuman, supernatural qualities, but it was not yet a glorified Body in the sense that the glory visibly shone from it (John 20:17). There is a difference. Later that day, when He had ‘ascended to my Father’ and been glorified (compare John 7:39), it was otherwise.
When all of us have received our reward, we shall still not all be equal in glory. The heavenly bodies differ in glory; the example is the stars. One star has a greater or lesser magnitude – brightness – than another. And it will always remain so. In heaven we are therefore not all identical. We are members of the Body of Christ; each has a different function. The Body of Christ is eternal – so that function remains. Whether it is exactly the same function, I cannot say, but I think it is, though at a different level. Beyond that I do not know.

What more can one say about heavenly things, of which we cannot truly form a picture? I believe I have read in my Bible that we too, in the future – at least after the seventieth week of Daniel – shall appear on earth, in more or less earthly bodies. In Old Testament times such things did occur. In our present age it is not really the intention that this should happen – though I suspect that the devil does sometimes appear. That is where these stories come from that people are 'angels'. But they are not angels of the Lord.
I think it is contrary to the nature of our present dispensation that angels should simply appear in that way. God works in secret; His Kingdom is hidden. Therefore there is, normally, no revelation of angels. Of course, if God wished He could do it, but even if it did happen, it would lie outside what Scripture teaches for our time.
That means that if an angel should appear to me and tell me all sorts of things, I would not pass that on to you. It would be of no use to you, and not to me either. I do not need to know what an angel supposedly tells me; I need to know what is written in the Bible.
The Church has a heavenly position, yet will nevertheless be involved in the manifestation of the Kingdom of Christ. The Church is regarded as an assembly (Greek ekklesia), a representation of humanity in those matters that are to be transacted with God. Conversely, priests also have a task from God towards men. I therefore believe that we as the Church will in the future have a function on earth – at least with respect to those who dwell upon the earth. Our responsibility is in the first place towards Israel, and the priestly function is to teach in the truths of God.
Luke 20:33 (text corresponding to KJV v.36)
Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.
We shall be equal unto the angels.

> Hebrews 1:14
> Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Angels are ministering spirits, sent out to serve. I could find further examples in Scripture, but I shall not go into them now. The main point is: everything that is in heaven always expresses itself toward the earth. That is what it is about.

Who are asleep in 1 Thessalonians 5?

Who are asleep in 1 Thessalonians 5?

1. “Times and seasons” – what are they?
   - When Paul says:
     “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you” (5:1)
     he is not saying, “you can’t know anything about God’s timetable.”
   - Instead, he assumes they already know the prophetic framework:
     - the coming Day of the Lord,
     - the order of events (rapture, tribulation, judgment, kingdom),
     - and the general conditions (“seasons”) in which they will unfold.
   - “Times and seasons” here are not exact dates on a calendar, but situations / phases in God’s plan.

2. The Day of the Lord – what is it?
   - “The day of the Lord” is a well-defined prophetic term, especially in the Old Testament.
   - It refers to the period when God openly intervenes in judgment on the nations.
   - It:
     - begins after the great tribulation over Israel (second half of Daniel’s 70th week),
     - is marked by cosmic signs (sun, moon, stars darkened; Joel 2, Joel 3, Matt 24),
     - leads into the manifest reign of Christ over the nations.
   - It comes “as a thief in the night” – suddenly and unexpectedly for them, not for informed believers.

3. “They” and “you” – two different groups
In 1 Thessalonians 5 there is a sharp contrast:
   - “They” (unbelieving world / apostate Israel):
     - say “Peace and safety” (false security in political agreements and human arrangements),
     - are overtaken by “sudden destruction” like birth pains,
     - “shall not escape.”
   - “You, brethren” (believers, the Church):
     - are “not in darkness” (v.4),
     - are “children of light, children of the day” (v.5),
     - therefore that day should not overtake you as a thief.

This is key:
The Day of the Lord comes like a thief for them, not for you.

Continue

4. So who are “asleep” in chapter 5?
Important distinction:

- In chapter 4, “those who are asleep” = believers who have died physically.
- In chapter 5, “sleep” is spiritual dullness, not physical death.

In 5:6–7:
“Let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”
“They that sleep sleep in the night…”
So:

- “Those who sleep” in 5:6–7 = people in spiritual darkness:
  - they don’t see reality as God sees it,
  - they don’t understand the times,
  - they live with no real expectation of Christ or judgment.
- This can especially describe the unbelieving world, but believers are warned not to live like that.

Believers can get spiritually drowsy, but they belong to the day, so they are exhorted to:

- stay awake (watchful),
- be sober (clear-headed),
- live armed with faith, love, and the hope of salvation (v.8).

5. Not appointed to wrath – what does that mean?

- “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:9).
- “Wrath” includes:
  - present wrath (God hiding His face, letting the world go its way)
  - and future wrath, including the coming tribulation and judgments.
- Believers are not destined for that wrath:
  - We are destined for salvation, in all its phases:
    - already saved in spirit,
    - being saved in our walk (soul),
    - will be saved in body (glorification).
- Therefore the Church will not pass through God’s eschatological wrath (the Day of the Lord / great tribulation) as judgment.

6. Whether awake or asleep, we live together with Him
1 Thessalonians 5:10:
“Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”
Here, the writer understands:

- “Wake or sleep” = whether a believer is:
  - spiritually alert or spiritually sluggish,
  - or even (by extension) alive or physically dead.
- Our eternal relationship with Christ is secure in Him:
  - all believers will be with Him and share His future,
  - not just the “super-spiritual” ones.

So:
Even if some believers are spiritually “asleep,” they will still be caught up with the Church at the rapture.
But the clear call is: don’t sleep. Live as what you are:
a child of light, of the day, watchful, sober, and oriented toward the coming salvation and glory.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, “those who sleep” are people in spiritual darkness—unaware of God’s purposes and unprepared for His Day—whereas believers are “children of the day,” not appointed to wrath but to salvation, and therefore called to stay awake, sober, and expectant of Christ and their future with Him.

1 Thessalonians 5:1

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

The words: 'But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you' seem quite at odds with the usual traditional views on this subject. If we ask about 'times and seasons', we generally get the answer that nobody knows them – not the Father, not the Son, not the angels in heaven; 'it comes suddenly, as a thief in the night'; the Lord Himself may even postpone it. People then often quote Acts 1:7: 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.'

First of all, I must point out that those statements are not directly about the rapture of the Church, but about a precise date. They are not about the events themselves, nor about the order in which they will happen. Here, in 1 Thessalonians 5, however, it is about the order of events.

I have always said that it does not really matter to us exactly when it will be. That is simply so, because we are not even sure about our own life in the flesh. It could end today. So spending your life waiting to see whether you might reach a certain year or date when the rapture happens is not particularly meaningful.

I once worked out a year; if I had not done it, someone else would. Scripture gives us attractive data about how long certain periods last, and so you can calculate. But, to my amusement at least, it turns out that such calculations do not fit neatly onto our calendar. That pleases me. You can work out the whole pattern carefully, and still not 'know the year'. Whether we truly live in the year '2001 since the birth of the Lord Jesus' (as this writer once did the sums) I seriously doubt.

But that uncertainty does not obscure what the Bible says about the events themselves and the sequence in which they will occur.

These 'times and seasons' are assumed to be known. In Scripture it is 'times and seasons', but we might read it as 'times, that is, seasons (or occasions)'. The stress is not on 'time' as such. That is rarely the case in the Bible. It is about 'the occasions' – the situations, the conditions at a given time.

You do not find a fixed calendar in the whole of Scripture. Periods are measured from one event to another, but even then it is not like the modern way we date things. The real issue is the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Those are the 'seasons', the occasions we may be part of, or which present themselves to us. That is what really matters here.

'Ye have no need that I write unto you' does not mean that they must not know these things. It means that they apparently already do know them. Nevertheless the Apostle writes them down. This wording hangs directly together with 4:13: 'I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep …' That does not mean that they were ignorant. It is simply to confirm the truth, to set it down in black and white. Paul left Titus behind in Crete to appoint elders, and then writes him a letter saying: 'For this cause left I thee in Crete'. As though Titus did not know that! But Paul wants it in writing. If anyone were to ask Titus: 'What are you doing here?' he could show the letter: 'Look, Paul has left me here. I have it in black and white.'

So 'ye have no need that I write unto you' means that the believers in Thessalonica had already been taught concerning the coming of Christ. They were not as naïve as some would like to suggest. They knew, because it is important that we know these things. What we know is decisive – almost one hundred per cent – for how we stand in life, how

we view things, and thus for the choices we make. Above all, it is crucial that we know what the future looks like and what we have to expect: the appearing of Christ in glory, and, connected with that, the rapture of the Church and the revelation of our glory.

> 2 Timothy 4:6–8
> For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Knowing that we shall receive a reward after our labour, that we shall receive a crown for our service to the Lord, is decisive for that service. We ought to know these things. We are on our way to a certain future, and that, in daily life, gives us exactly the strength we need. It gives us joy and peace in our everyday walk.

What I have said in connection with chapter 4 still applies here. The subject is not, in the first place, the rapture of the Church as such. The primary subject is that great and important event which the Old Testament foretold: the coming of the Messiah, and what follows from it.

> **1 Thessalonians 5:2**
> For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

It concerns the beginning of ‘the day of the Lord’, and that means that this is a reference to some thirty Old Testament passages. It is not a vague term with a hazy content, although it is often treated as if it were – simply because people do not really know the term biblically.

We are so used to the idea that ‘the day of the Lord’ is ‘the first day of the week’, a sort of Christian Sunday-label. Whoever invented that, I do not know, but it is utterly unbiblical. In that sense the expression is never used in the Bible. In the New Testament we find it five times; in the Old Testament many more. The last time in… (and there the exposition continues).

> Malachi 4:5
> Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

If you read all the relevant passages, it becomes clear that this is an expression referring to the period in which the Lord Himself will bring His judgement upon the nations. The word ‘day’ does not only indicate a particular span of time, but especially judgement. ‘The day shall declare it’, for ‘the day’ is by definition the period in which there is light, and judgement brings things to light.

> 1 Corinthians 4:3
> But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

The translators could hardly do other than render it with ‘judgement’, but the underlying word is actually the word for ‘day’. In the King James translation it is simply translated ‘day’. In English there is the expression ‘the day of man’, but in Dutch or other Western languages they do not know that phrase. Luther had to be judged; he appeared before what we call the High Council.

With the expression ‘the day of Christ’ it concerns a judgement of the Lord over the Church. That is our manifestation before the judgement seat of Christ (Romans 14:10).

> 2 Corinthians 6:2
> For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

We, on the other hand, live in ‘the day of salvation’; and in Ephesians 4:30 Paul speaks of ‘the day of redemption’. ‘The day of the LORD’ therefore has to do with judgement from God. There is some misunderstanding about this ‘day’, even in dispensational circles. Some say: that is the great tribulation, but that is not quite correct, because it is not precise enough. It is great tribulation, but, strangely enough, it is not the designation of the great tribulation of three and a half years that will come upon Israel. It is great tribulation especially in the period that follows. It is the time of tribulation upon the nations in general. (See also the study on Zephaniah, the Bible book in which ‘the day of the LORD’ appears the most.)

> **1 Thessalonians 5:3**
> For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

What is here called ‘shall not escape’ and ‘sudden’ is, in Zephaniah, ‘a speedy riddance’. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 is therefore a reference back to Zephaniah, and more specifically to:

> Zephaniah 1:18
> Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

The day of the LORD officially begins when ‘the sun and the moon’ have become dark ‘and the stars’ become dark.

> Joel 3:14–15
> Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.

Already in Joel 2:1–2 it said:

> Joel 2:1–2
> Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, …

And further on in that chapter:

> Joel 2:31
> The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

How that darkening comes about is clear enough, for it has been described in the previous verses of the chapter. The whole land is on fire, and then you see nothing of the heavens any more. In addition, there will be an earthquake, at least in Jerusalem, and normally in such a case you see nothing of the heavens either, because of the enormous clouds of dust that go with it. The sun and moon and stars will be darkened, and that marks the beginning of ‘the day of the LORD’.

When, at the beginning of that 'day', the Lord will appear out of the clouds with us, the Church, then those are the clouds in which we went to meet Him earlier (1 Thessalonians 4:17). It is the event that leads to the destruction of Jerusalem at the end of the seventieth week of Daniel. Those three and a half years of 'sudden destruction' then reach their climax, and that is the moment when the Messiah will appear according to the well-known prophecy of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9:24: 'Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city …', which the Lord Jesus Himself cites in Matthew 24.

> Matthew 24:29
> Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

'Immediately' after the tribulation of 1,260 days (three and a half years) for the Jewish state, the sun, moon and stars will be darkened. If you take it strictly – not that this is always equally crucial – the day of the LORD begins immediately after the seventieth week of Daniel. Whenever Scripture says 'the day of the LORD is near', the judgement upon Israel goes before it. Before judgement comes upon the nations of the earth, it comes first upon the nation that ought to have had the birthright, and that is Israel. When the day of the LORD is then described, it is the description of the period after the seventieth week of Daniel.

The announced great tribulation over all nations comes, in the first instance, upon the Jewish people, namely from the middle of the seventieth week until the end of it. That tribulation over the Jewish people, strictly speaking, is not part of what the Bible calls the day of the LORD. It precedes it.

If you want to discuss among yourselves whether we may agree to use the term 'day of the LORD' also for 'the great tribulation' in the second half of the seventieth week of Daniel, then you may do so, but I do not think it is responsible. Then we are being sloppy. First there is 'the tribulation of those days', and then comes the synchronising sign: 'the sun, the moon and the stars shall be darkened', and after that the day of the LORD begins.

The first three and a half years are 'peace and safety'. The second three and a half years are 'great tribulation'. But the 'tribulation' does not end there; it continues much longer for the other nations. In practice it runs on for a further thirty-three years, until we reach 'the thousand years'. At the same time, the Kingdom of Christ begins. As the Lord brings judgement upon the nations, He reveals Himself as the King, and thus the Kingdom has begun. And that does not begin before the end of the seventieth week.

The point is that 'that day' will come unexpectedly – exactly as the Old Testament already says. The dawning of the day of the LORD is, in practice, the descending of the Lord, as described in chapter 4:16.

Verses 2 and 3 of chapter 5 tell us that that day comes 'as a thief in the night' and therefore 'suddenly', 'unexpectedly', for that is what it means. That does not concern us at all, for it says: 'For when they shall say …' We do not say such a thing, for we will already have gone to meet Him before that day of the LORD. 'When they shall say, Peace and safety …' is the hallmark of the first half of the seventieth week of Daniel. Those three and a half years begin after the rapture of the Church, with the making of a covenant with the opposite party – if you ask me, with the Palestinians. In any case, it concerns Jerusalem, according to:

Daniel 9:27

And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

Everyone in our day is waiting for a covenant concerning Jerusalem. But before that time we are gone. Through the rapture of the Church, the relationships in the world will change anyway, because of the revelation of the antichrist (2 Thessalonians). That will be the occasion and background for a rapid peace agreement in the Middle East. After that period of 'peace and safety' there follows another three and a half years, of which it is said: 'then sudden destruction cometh upon them …' That is the feature of the second half of the seventieth week. Then no one reckons any more on such destruction, for had they not concluded a covenant? The destruction does indeed come, and not, as is often thought, because the covenant is broken. Other powers, other nations, will intervene in the situation in the Middle East – particularly the eastern European powers, Russia in other words: Gog, Magog, Meshech, Tubal. Those armies will conquer Canaan and Judea, as is described for instance in Joel 2 and Zechariah 14, at the time when the day of the LORD is near. That is why the land is first laid waste. 'Sudden destruction' – destruction that comes unexpectedly – 'as travail upon a woman with child' suddenly overtakes her. 'And they shall not escape', for it is 'determined'. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 is a straightforward reference to the whole seventieth week of Daniel. In Matthew 24 the Lord Jesus Himself also refers to that period and to the prophecies of Daniel.

Matthew 24:15, 21, 29–30

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be…….Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Verses 15 and 21 refer to Daniel 12; verse 29 to Joel 2; and verse 30 to Zechariah 12 and 13.

1 Thessalonians 5:4–5

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

Darkness takes people captive and makes their world smaller. It puts man in a spiritual prison. In contrast to that, we, as 'sons (heirs) of light', do not live in that darkness. Notice the great emphasis here: we are expected to know these things. We know what the Lord has done for us in the past, and what He is doing for us now. We also know what our future is, and we know where this world is heading. God has revealed it by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10). That is not our merit. But it is our responsibility to acquaint ourselves with it, so that in practice we live as 'children of light' (Ephesians 5:8).

1 Thessalonians 5:6–7

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

'in darkness' corresponds more or less to 'sleeping'. That is a state of not seeing, of not knowing what reality is. 'Of the night', 'to sleep', and 'to be drunk' belong together. When you sleep you know nothing and have no hope. Someone who is drunk has a very narrow field of vision: he hardly sees anything, and what he does see he does not rightly grasp; and if he does react to what he sees, he reacts too late.

According to Peter, believers are not drunk, precisely because they pay heed to what has been prophesied:

Acts 2:15–16

For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

Over against sleeping in the night and being drunk like 'the others', verse 6 says of us, 'the children of light' of verse 5, that we are to be awake and sober. This is then followed by verse 8:

1 Thessalonians 5:8

But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

This too is a reference to the Old Testament, to Isaiah 59, where these terms (especially in verse 17) are applied to the Lord Jesus Himself. In Ephesians 6 this armour is set out at much greater length, where in verse 13 it says: 'Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God …' We are 'of the day' and should actually walk in that light of the Word of God.

Romans 13:11–12

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

1 Thessalonians 5:9

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ;

The thought in verse 8 is not that we must do the things described there in order to escape the 'wrath'. That is not what it says at all. Perhaps that is a bit of Calvinistic thinking: we must do this, we must do that, otherwise we shall come into judgement, or into wrath, or even into the great tribulation – as some teach. 'If you do not perform well enough, you will not go with the Church at the rapture.' That teaching is then needed to keep the believers of the local church in line. The idea is that we must do our best in order to achieve something.

Scripture says it exactly the other way round – but really the other way round. Namely: we are holy, and therefore we should walk in holiness. Not in order to become holy, but because we are holy. It begins with what we **are**, holy in other words, and then we are pointed to the consequences – the logical follow-on. Not so much in order to reach a

particular goal, as rather the logical result, the outworking of what has already been achieved. And that not by us, but it is what the Lord has achieved.

> Ephesians 4:1
> I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

We ought to live as children of God – not in order to become children, of course, but because we are children; and: 'God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation.' Therefore we should also fix our attention on that salvation, and even 'work out' that salvation.

> Philippians 2:12–13
> Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Those Philippians were, of course, already saved, for they were born-again children of God. But here it is about the outworking of that salvation, with the thought that the Lord Himself would bring about that 'working out of what we have become' through us. It is not even primarily that we should do it.

The expression 'God hath not appointed us to …' is very strong. Wherever there is such an 'appointing', it has long since taken place. These things are already fixed. God has appointed us 'to obtain salvation'. Here it is about the explicit contrast between that unbelieving people of Israel – that is, the Jewish people – and that believing people which we know as the Church, of which we are members. In that connection it is said: 'God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation.'

It can hardly be otherwise, for everywhere else in Scripture we learn that the penalty for sin and disobedience has been removed, and that we have become partakers of that by faith. There is not some further wrath waiting for us afterwards – certainly not the great tribulation or the like.

Here and there one hears the teaching that we, as the Church, must go through the great tribulation in order to be refined. That would be rather unfortunate for the believers who have gone before us, those who have 'fallen asleep', for they would then miss the opportunity of being refined in the great tribulation! That is how one ends up in all sorts of strange and thoroughly unbiblical and illogical lines of reasoning.

It would be utterly inconsistent if those who have been declared righteous and perfect in Christ should nonetheless be placed under the wrath of God. 'God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation.' That is true now, and it applies also to the future.

There are those who do not believe in the rapture of the Church before the great tribulation, and they point out that it does not say here 'the wrath to come', but simply 'wrath'. They say: 'So this has nothing to do with the great tribulation.' But the great tribulation is, of course, included in that. The 'great tribulation' is called 'the wrath to come'. And if, in some contexts, it should not be speaking of that 'wrath to come', then it can only be about the present wrath – and from that too we have been delivered. That is precisely what this passage is about.

The present wrath of God consists in the fact that the light has been taken from the world, that God hides His face from the world, that He has let mankind go its own way (Romans 1, 2 and 5; see also our earlier discussion of John 3). God is silent in our days.

In the future He will speak again – but then in His wrath. ‘Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure’ – those who take counsel together ‘against the LORD, and against his anointed’ (Psalm 2).
When do we obtain salvation? There are three ‘salvations’. We are saved as to the spirit; we are being saved here as to the soul (that is, in our practical life); and we shall be saved as to the body. When it says here that ‘God hath appointed us to obtain salvation’, that does not only concern the future, but just as much the present.
With that language we are gradually brought back to the beginning of the epistle, where it speaks of sanctification, spiritual growth, living as children of God in this world – separated from the world and devoted to the service of the Lord. ‘For this is the will of God …’ says chapter 4 verse 3. The more we come to the knowledge of Christ and of the power of His resurrection (Philippians 3:10), the more we are saved, and the more we do not live under wrath. Sadly, in general the level of knowledge of Scripture is very poor, and that means that people walk in darkness and do not know the Lord Jesus, let alone the power of His resurrection. They know His Name and know that He has risen and believe that too – but that is quite a different matter from knowing Him.
God brings about that salvation ‘by our Lord Jesus Christ’ – not merely because He lives or will come, but because He would do His work in us. He would enlighten us inwardly, in the heart. That good work He has begun in us, and He will complete it ‘until the day of Jesus Christ’:

> Philippians 1:6
> Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:10

Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

If you read verses 9 and 10 carefully, you can see that there are two possibilities: either we live under wrath, or we live together with Him – in practice, of course. We are to ‘live together with Him’, whether we are awake or asleep. Paul says: even if you are asleep, you still live together with Him. Only, it is not the Lord’s intention that we should sleep, but that we should watch.
I also conclude from this that once the moment of the rapture of the Church has come, it will certainly not be only those believers who are consciously expecting the rapture who are taken up. The rest will go as well.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

‘Edify’ here is in the sense of ‘building one another up’. This is the standard expression in the Corinthian letters for the work that the Lord does and in which we ought to be involved. Edification, building up, is an old term for the building of the Church, the House of God, that dwelling-place of God, that Temple.
What is here translated ‘comfort’ is the same word as ‘comfort’ in chapter 4:18. It is ‘encouraging’, and really also simply ‘edifying’: helping one another, just as the Lord is our Comforter – the One who encourages us, strengthens us, stands at our side, and therefore consoles us.

Our expectation for the future is decisive for our present. When we know where we are heading, when we know what our future is, that will have an effect on how we live today. And we ought to remind one another of that, for encouragement.

1 Thessalonians 5:12

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

Words of this kind are found not only here, but in quite a number of other places in Scripture. These are strong words – not always as weighty as here, but still. 'Know them which labour among you …' is, in practice, always an issue. In general it is not at all easy to give teaching from Scripture. It is often a struggle, bringing clashes with people and their way of life and their way of thinking. Sadly, that is just how it is.

The obvious result is that when these brothers 'who labour among you' – these serving brothers – meet so much opposition and so little recognition, this will damage the preaching. It may well be that the Word is preached less, or even that the message is diluted. If you want to learn something, you have to listen and recognise someone as a teacher. That does not mean you must immediately swallow everything that is said, but that afterwards you should 'search the scriptures, whether those things were so', like an honest Berean (Acts 17:10–11).

We ought to show the speaker, the elder, or whoever it is, a basic goodwill.

1 Thessalonians 5:13

And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

The Bible tells us that God has given teachers to the Church. These passages show that we should give such teachers space to function. We should honour them, esteem them for their work's sake. That benefits all of us. It is for our good.

Hebrews 13:7, 17

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

At the end of 1 Thessalonians 5:13 it says: 'And be at peace among yourselves.' In practice, that means being of one mind. Romans 12:16 says: 'Be of the same mind one toward another.'

We no longer understand the word 'peace' very well – only as the opposite of war. But 'peace' in the Bible languages, both in Hebrew and in Greek, has the sense of oneness, and therefore of fellowship. You see that most clearly in Ephesians 2:14: 'For he is our peace, who hath made both one …'

It is that unity that is also in view in the following short phrases. They are not directly linked to one another, but each of them expresses this principle: 'be at peace among yourselves.'

1 Thessalonians 5:14

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

This is a different word for ‘exhort’ than is usually used. Here the word means ‘to warn’ – to warn of danger, which you might also call admonishing. In all these situations we should indeed support one another.

Galatians 6:2

Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

We are to bear one another’s burdens, it says here – and by doing so we fulfil ‘the law of Christ’. Then follows a ‘worldly principle’:

1 Thessalonians 5:15

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

People repay evil with evil and regard that as just. And no doubt it is just, according to earthly, worldly principles. But this is not a principle under the New Covenant.

Romans 12:19

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Where vengeance is to be taken, where ‘evil for evil’ is to be repaid, the Lord will do it – but we, in any case, will not. This brings us back again to our position of humility. It is not our right to avenge ourselves; on the contrary, that is the task of the One whom we serve. The Lord will do it. He will look after our interests; and we are happily freed from that burden. That is one load less, I always think.

‘Ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.’

First within the Church – for that is what ‘among yourselves’ means. Then ‘to all men’, that is, towards those who are outside, those who do not belong to the Church – the unbelievers.

We should always pursue what is good, and ignore the evil – that is the idea. Then verse 16 can also apply:

1 Thessalonians 5:16

Rejoice evermore.

That is, under every circumstance, because God is for us – and therefore who can be against us? Nothing can really go wrong. What may seem to go wrong in human terms is something of which we learn that ‘all things work together for good to them that love God’, that is, to those who serve Him (Romans 8:28). Or we regard it as a testing of our faith, and thus as a fresh reason to place our trust all the more in our Lord. That is the next verse:

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Pray without ceasing.

Personally I find this an important verse. I would struggle if it said, ‘Pray every day’, as if it were something to be done at fixed times. But here it simply says: ‘Pray without ceasing.’ From this it is clear that prayer is, first of all, a way of life, a stance of the heart. Prayer is always about that. It is living continually in dependence upon Him.

Prayer has two sides; it is two-way traffic. It can be worship, but it can also be a requesting prayer. That is what is called ‘supplications’. When you ask for help, it should, if all is well, at the same time be an acknowledgement of the power and authority of the One to whom you are asking – the One to whom you pray.

First and foremost, then, it is a life-attitude, for there is little point in determining our own way, organising our own life, and then occasionally asking the Lord to help. That will inevitably put you in a position where you call on the Lord to support your own plans and own works. Hence 'pray without ceasing'.
We should accept life as He gives it, and at the same time use that life to His glory. To live to His glory – that is worship.
That is why I sometimes sound a bit negative about, for example, 'praise meetings'. Not that there is anything inherently wrong with them, but they set themselves apart from the rest of life. There is little value in coming together to tell the Lord how great He is. He knows that very well already. If we truly recognise Him as such, we will show that in our everyday lives.
If we only sing it, but it has no expression in ordinary daily life, then it means nothing – in fact, it is a kind of taking His name in vain. It is similar to what is dealt with in 1 Corinthians: you participate in the Lord's supper, you eat of the bread and drink of the cup; but if, in the rest of your life, that unity of the Church which you are expressing there plays no real role, then you are eating and drinking unworthily – because it contradicts your normal daily life. The apostle says: see the Lord's supper as an example for practical living. That is how you should live: in fellowship with each other, serving one another.
The same applies to prayer. There is little point occasionally asking the Lord for things or saying something to Him if our lives are not in line with it. Our whole life should be a prayer – in dependence on Him and in His service.

> **1 Thessalonians 5:18**
> In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

This is really 'give thanks without ceasing'. It, too, is a life-attitude: one of gratitude towards the Lord. If we are conscious that we receive life from Him, and that He gives us what we need, then that will show in the way we live.
'The will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you' is that we should pray without ceasing and give thanks to God in everything. That again shows that it is not about occasional acts, but about a way of life, characteristic of the Christian life: living in submission to Him, in dependence on Him, and at the same time to His glory.
'This is the will of God' we already read in chapter 4:3, followed by: 'even your sanctification.' In practice that is the same as 'pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks.'

> **1 Thessalonians 5:19**
> Quench not the Spirit.

This is picture-language, in which 'the Spirit' is presented as a fire – and that is energy. That is really what is in view. We cannot produce energy without fire. It always involves combustion, transformation. Even nuclear energy, if I can put it like that, is still 'fire' in the sense that something is being transformed. That is what fire does; and that is also what the Spirit does: transforming the old into the new. From solid to gas; from flesh to Spirit, so to speak. The Spirit transforms the old man into the New Man; the old creation into the New Creation. And as that happens, energy is released. You cannot see that energy, but you can certainly experience it.

The Spirit works in secret – inwardly – and that is why He is called Spirit. Otherwise He would, without exception, be called 'Christ in us'. He is called Spirit, but it is Christ, precisely because He works in the hidden, inner man. It is not the Lord's intention that this work should be seen outwardly in some spectacular way, for that would conflict with the character of our present dispensation, in which the Lord hides Himself – in our innermost being.
How it expresses itself is hard to describe. Does it give strength? Yes – at least, in my understanding, it certainly prompts me to do things. I am completely convinced of that – things I would never have done by nature, in any way, and yet they happen. You simply receive the strength for them. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9) is likewise inward. You cannot see those things, but you can see their effects, and you can perhaps recognise them in yourself.
Our own bodily energy also comes through 'burning', though more slowly. Digestion is burning – a transformation.
We are not to quench that Spirit – that power and energy. If that Spirit is viewed as a Person (and He is, for it is the Lord Himself), then it says: 'grieve not the holy Spirit of God' (Ephesians 4:30). You can quench the Spirit, you can grieve Him. In other words, you can hinder the Lord's work. Strictly speaking, to sin against the Holy Spirit is also to hinder Christ. That has to do with unbelief. But it can be hindered. If we do not make ourselves available, the Lord will not do His work in us. Or, earlier still: if we do not come to faith, we are not born again by Him. It may be that God wills all men to be saved, but they are not all saved – simply because they refuse, and thus resist His working.
In a second step, that can also happen with believers. We often see a Christian hindering the Lord's work, even actively fighting against it. That is another step further – but it can happen. And we are warned about it.
The opposite of 'quench not the Spirit' is 'be filled with the Spirit' (Ephesians 5:18). The responsibility for this lies with the believer himself. The Lord is not the problem; nor is the Spirit. We ought to allow ourselves to be filled – and the opposite is that we quench Him, or grieve Him.
The more we read and take in the Word of God, the more we will take on God's thoughts, and therefore His mind. That is something quite natural – spiritually speaking.

1 Thessalonians 5:20

Despise not prophesyings.

'Prophesyings' – that is, in fact, the whole of Scripture. Prophecy does not necessarily and exclusively speak about the future. Prophecy is the spoken Word of God, and we are not to despise it. That the greater part of God's Word concerns the future is clear enough. Those promises made to us we are not to treat lightly.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Before there is faith, there should, if all is well, be a search for truth. One asks after the truth, one seeks – and if one seeks, one will find, Scripture says (Matthew 7:7). One then comes to believe in what has been found – or rather, in the One who has allowed Himself to be found.
Characteristic of a believer should then be that he tests things – that is, examines them. As believers, we sometimes hold our breath when others set off 'in search', because you

never know where they may end up. But if someone is sincere, as a child of God, it cannot go wrong. Why not? Because the Lord will not allow it to go wrong.
But it is not just a matter of testing all things and filling your life with that. The point is that we hold fast that which is good. And we will come to recognise what that good is, because the Lord will guide us into the truth (John 16:13). That is what the Shepherd does for the sheep; that is what the High Priest does for His people.

1 Thessalonians 5:22

Abstain from all appearance of evil.

This verse is linked with the ones before it. We are to examine the Word of God and not fix our attention on evil, or on anything that looks evil or seems evil. We should keep away from that. Not because it is necessarily really evil in itself, but because if it appears evil, it has a negative effect on us. This is the same as 'a conscience of the idol' (1 Corinthians 8:7). If you think something is wrong, and you are sensitive to it, then you should keep away from it. That is what is meant by 'abstain from all appearance of evil'.
What we really ought to abstain from is teaching that is thoroughly unbiblical. As soon as we get a sense of that, it is time to get out. We do not need to know it. We should stay well away from it, so that it does not become a burden to us.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This verse is sometimes misused by those who say that man consists of spirit, soul and body, 'because this verse says so'. I do not deny what the verse literally says, but that idea is contrary to the point of the verse. The point here is precisely that we should not be divided up in that way, because it is about the whole person.
'Peace' has to do with unity, with fellowship; and 'sanctification' does as well – even in English, where the word-group is related to making whole, making one. 'The God of peace' makes us one. 'The very God of peace sanctify you wholly.' Not: 'your spirit and your soul and your body' as three separate things each sanctified, but: 'your whole spirit and soul and body' – in this form simply meaning: as one whole.
We, as complete persons, are to be 'preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'. That is what the Lord wants to do in us. Whether any one of us will ever reach that ideal, I rather doubt. But the point is that the Lord is doing a work which has these things in view.
We are on our way to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ – not to death, not to dying – because there, as whole persons, including the body, we shall be set blameless, unchargeable, and shall receive a full reward. We must not say: 'This applies to me spiritually in this way, but to my body in that way.' Our body has been made alive through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. We are to present our bodies 'a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God' (Romans 12:1). So we should not say that we have a sinful or unholy body, for it has been sanctified by the fact that Christ Himself dwells in us.
With our whole spirit, body and soul – that is, with the whole of our walk – we ought to be blameless and serve the Lord. And for anyone who thinks we cannot do that, the next verse says:

1 Thessalonians 5:24

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

He who calls us to sonship is faithful – in the sense that He will also accomplish it. He will bring us there; at least, that is His intention. The fault does not lie with Him. For He will do what He has promised.

2 Corinthians 1:20

For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

If anything goes wrong, it really does lie with us. Whether that is blameworthy or not is not the issue here. The only point is that we should seek what is good; and He is faithful. Hebrews 3 says that the Lord Jesus Christ, in His present function, is faithful to the One who appointed Him.

Hebrews 3:1–2

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.

Our High Priest is, first of all, faithful to the One who has appointed Him and sent Him (He is the Apostle), and therefore He is also faithful towards us, the children of God.

1 Thessalonians 5:25

Brethren, pray for us.

Paul may perhaps use big words; these may look like very high ideals to us. Paul himself evidently also had his uncertainties. By nature he was as weak as we are. But for us all the same truth holds:

2 Corinthians 12:9

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

The apostle who tells us how it ought to be says himself: ‘Brethren, pray for us.’ And so we are, after all, back together on the same level.

1 Thessalonians 5:26

Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

The kiss is an expression of fellowship. That is why, in former days, boys and girls were not supposed to kiss one another before marriage – at least in some circles – because it expresses communion. A Hebrew scholar once explained it this way: kissing is really ‘eating one another up’.

The emphasis here is not on the kiss but on the ‘holy’ kiss. It is about a holy fellowship. We give one another ‘the right hand of fellowship’ – that is a biblical term (Galatians 2:9). I generally leave it at that. But the real point is that we should greet one another in the sense that we are one in Christ. That is how we ought to see each other.

1 Thessalonians 5:27

I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

The message of this Epistle is extremely important. Every believer ought to know what is taught here – not only the message concerning sanctification, but also the

consequences of that sanctification for the future: namely, our glorification with Christ, and of course our manifestation before the judgement seat of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:28

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

This is the usual closing greeting at the end of the letter. Such a greeting at the conclusion is in fact a summary of the whole Epistle. This is what it all comes down to; this is what it is all about: the grace of the New Covenant under which we live.

Grace that comes to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace that has been given to us from God, through which we have not only been snatched out of a dark world, but have become children of God, born again. By that grace we have been called to be placed as sons.

It is the grace of God by which it has been granted to us – while we are still living in a sinful body – to serve the Lord. That is what is to be expected of a human being, and all the more of us as children of God.

Under every circumstance we ought to realise that we live entirely out of the grace that God gives us. Yet that is not exactly how it is phrased in this last verse. It says: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ …'

In a certain sense, a natural man, as a creature of God, lives by the grace of God. From God man receives breath, and life, and all things (1 Timothy 6:17).

But 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' tells us that God – for us as believers – gives us all things, including our daily life. Bound up with that is a life lived to the glory of His Name. Whether that is seen now by other people, or even by ourselves, is not the issue at all. The world will see it in the future; today it does not.

What matters is whether the Lord sees it. From Him we shall receive reward. Therefore we should not focus on visible things. We should not, in the first place, be 'bringing ourselves up' or arranging our lives according to our own plans. Rather, we ought to be conscious of our dependence on Him.

Do we live in fellowship with Him? Can the Lord use us as 'them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus'? (1 Corinthians 1:2) In practice, do we place our lives at His disposal? (Romans 12:1)

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

2 Thessalonians 1:1 - 3

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

Epistle is already brought out here in this first chapter. It is not merely about interesting information concerning the future, but about the future glory of the Church. Just as in the first letter to the Thessalonians, the main subject is sanctification, which is to lead to 'the glory which shall be revealed in us' (Romans 8:18).

What the three writers of this letter wish for the believers in general, and those in Thessalonica in particular, is: 'Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' That is exactly what man needs most. It is what most characterises the New Covenant under which we live: it is the 'Covenant of grace', the 'Covenant of peace'.
We receive grace from God – and we receive it freely. In practice, we then have found peace, which means the end of 'striving' and of the unrest that exists under 'the rudiments of the world', under the law, under the Old Covenant.
'God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ' – only He can give this. We will not find it on earth in any other way, however people may seek. Hence: 'Grace unto you, and peace' – for this is what we are intended to live by daily.
According to verse 3, the positive developments in Thessalonica are a reason to give thanks to God. It is 'meet' (right, fitting) to do so, 'because that your faith groweth exceedingly; and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.'
Faith ought to grow – and that can happen in two ways. One is quantitative: because we learn more and more from the Bible. The other is qualitative: because we increasingly trust what the Bible says. When faith increases 'in breadth', you automatically get a strengthening of that faith. You need a broad base if you are going to build high. The more we know from Scripture, the stronger our conviction. So: knowing more, and being more firmly established – that is how faith 'grows exceedingly'. That is the intention.
How does Paul know that the faith of these Thessalonians is growing so greatly? From what follows: because 'the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.' John writes in his first Epistle how you can tell that someone is a child of God, a brother: by the fact that he loves the brethren. As there is faith, one will love the believers – that is, serve one another through love. Then there will be unity, fellowship, a real bond.

2 Thessalonians 1:4
So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

The church in Thessalonica is held up in other places as an example. 'Look there – that is how it should be.' Which automatically means it was not like that everywhere, but here, happily, it was. And that was certainly a cause for thanksgiving.
Your 'patience' is your endurance, your steadfastness – connected with total commitment, whatever trouble it may bring with it. in plain English, we might say: your willingness to suffer and your faithfulness with all the pressures brought upon us.
We could paraphrase: 'your endurance and faithfulness in all your persecutions and tribulations which you bear.' We are to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ – that is, be faithful to Him and remain so. We are to serve Him for the rest of our lives.
You may say you are a believer; but if that faith is never opposed, if you never run into trouble in this world, or never bring yourself into difficulty for His sake – how then is that faith to be tested? Faith is strengthened, among other things, because it is exercised; and that happens as it is opposed. We are tested as to our loyalty to the Lord. If we remain faithful, we come out of it stronger.

Romans 5:3–4
And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;
And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

James puts it even more strongly:

> James 1:2–4
> My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

James immediately replaces the word ‘temptation’ with ‘trying’ – a testing. And Peter says:

> 1 Peter 1:7
> That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

In Thessalonica they are clearly being persecuted; but that contributes to the building up of their faith. The testing is, in the first instance, ‘temptation’, and temptation comes from the devil. Yet the remarkable thing is that this is used to build our faith, and thus for the glory of God. It is all in the framework of ‘all things work together for good to them that love God’ (Romans 8:28).

> **2 Thessalonians 1:5–8**
> Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,
> In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

‘Manifest token’ means: a clear indication, a firm proof. There will be a righteous judgement of God. Here it is explained that there will be judgement upon those who are bringing the persecution, and glory (reward) for those who bear the persecution. That is the proof of ‘the righteous judgment of God’.

‘Rest’ is another word for ‘refreshment’, ‘relief’, ‘reviving’. Sometimes the word is translated ‘refreshing’ or ‘coolness’ – the heat of tribulation having passed away. ‘Times of refreshing’ in Acts 3:19 is a term used for the whole New Testament period, in contrast to the law and the dominion of the Old Covenant. Here, however, it is especially used in connection with the reward and glory which we shall receive in the Day of Christ.

It is about those ‘that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ’. That implies that they have heard it. Scripture says that the gospel would be preached in all the world, to all nations, before the judgement comes – for example in Matthew 24, the long discourse of the Lord on the things to come, where He speaks of the days before the flood of Noah. People then had no idea – or did not want to know – that judgement was coming within a limited time.

> Matthew 24:39
> And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

It was the unbelievers who were taken away in the days of Noah; and that will be the case again in the future, shortly before the thousand years begin. It is said in verses 40 and 41:

Matthew 24:40–41

Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

This is not well rendered in the KJV. The thought is that the one who is taken is removed, and the one who is left remains on earth and so enters the promised Kingdom of Christ on earth. They will see 'the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power', as verse 9 puts it.

2 Thessalonians 1:9

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

These people, of whom he speaks here, are afterwards cast into 'everlasting destruction', as it is called here, so that they will most certainly know what they are missing. Not only shall 'every eye see him' (Revelation 1:7), but also 'every knee shall bow' (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10). That means that there, in that place, they must finally acknowledge how things really stand – in order that they may yet give glory to the Lord and confess Him – but by then it is too late. Justice must be administered, and they must realise that anyone who rejects the Lord and His life-giving Word has forfeited the right to life.

After all, the life we now have we received out of nowhere, suddenly. We had no right to it. We were not even asked whether we wanted it. If someone then loses it again, he cannot make any claim of right upon it.

2 Thessalonians 1:10

When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

Why does He come? 'To be glorified in his saints.' That has not yet happened. True, there are disciples who say, 'we beheld his glory' (John 1:14). The Lord has indeed appeared in glory to believers, on occasion even to five hundred at once, according to 1 Corinthians 15. But that is as far as it went. He has never appeared as the Risen One to the world – not to Israel, nor to the Jewish people, nor to Jerusalem, nor anything of that kind. Officially, the world has been waiting two thousand years, as far as I can see in Scripture, for Him to begin to do that. The whole world is still waiting for the revelation of His glory. The Lord hides His glory from the world, because they would not receive its blessings. The intention is that people should believe in Him. For that purpose the gospel is preached, and 'our testimony among you was believed.' Those who believe will share directly in that glory – but the revelation of it awaits 'that day', the day of judgement.

He expresses His glory in us – that is His intention – and thus we shall share in His glory. That is His goal, and He knew that on the night in which He was betrayed, when He said:

John 17:4–5

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

Hebrews 12 says essentially the same thing in different words: 'for the joy that was set before him'. On the way to that joy, sin was condemned in His flesh (Romans 8:3), for

judgement is involved. Judgement on the old man, that the New Man might be manifested; judgement on the old creation, that the New Creation might be revealed.

> **2 Thessalonians 1:11**
> Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:

It is about 'the work of faith'. Not 'works of faith' done by us, but 'the work of faith' of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His work; it flows from His faithfulness. 'Calling' here is calling unto sonship – sadly often translated as 'adoption of children'. Ephesians 4:1 says: 'walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.'
If God counts us worthy of this calling to sonship, He will 'fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness'. That expression may sound a bit vague, but that is why the next phrase explains what it means in concrete terms: He fulfils 'the work of faith with power'.
'The good pleasure of his goodness' means that this work comes from God's goodness, and therefore from His grace (verse 12), from His mercy – but also from His good pleasure. Ephesians 1:5 speaks of this: 'according to the good pleasure of his will.'
'The work of faith' is work that comes forth from faith (trust, obedience). Whose faith? The question itself gives the answer: here it is His faith. Out of His faith He has done a work by which we have been justified (Romans 1:17). If the Lord Jesus Himself had not held fast to the Word and the promises of God, if He had not gone the way and run the race set before Him (Hebrews 12:1–2), the salvation we know today would never have been accomplished.
His suffering on the cross – what we usually call His atoning work, though it embraces more than that – was, for example, 'a work of faith'.

> **2 Thessalonians 1:12**
> That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The goal is the glorification of the Lord. This is essentially brought about when we, as people living on earth, 'compassed with infirmity', in a world ruled by law, sin, death, and by him that has 'the power of death, that is, the devil' (Hebrews 2:14), nevertheless remain faithful to the Word of God and to serving Him. That is to the glory of God, and in doing so we are in effect making a long nose at the devil.
'That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you …' – that can just as well mean 'by you'. That is, on account of our fellowship with Him; and conversely, 'and ye in him', on account of His fellowship with us. That is the sense of the word 'in' in Greek, and thus in the Bible: it expresses close union.
Our word 'baptism', in the biblical sense, really means 'immersion into': 'baptism into Christ' and 'baptism into water'. The Greek word-picture is: going into, and being saturated with. This is explained in 1 Corinthians 12: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body … and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.'
That is: made into one whole – just as a sponge under water is saturated with water.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:1**
> Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

The apostle uses two different expressions in connection with the return of Christ. The first is 'the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'. The other is in verse 2: 'the day of Christ'. But that is actually a misunderstanding, for in the Greek text it reads 'the day of the Lord'. In some modern English translations, this has been corrected.
Our 'gathering together unto him' is not the same thing as 'the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'. We ought to realise that. Our gathering to Him comes first, and after that follows His coming – which is also our coming.
The expression 'the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' is often understood as His return as a single event, because people no longer really know what the word means. When we hear 'future' we think of the time that is still to come, of things that will happen afterwards. But the word 'coming' here is literally 'arrival'; the Greek term means 'presence', 'being present'. We recognise the word straightaway: the Greek parousia is the same as our 'presence'.
The stress is not just on being present, but on becoming present. When we speak of 'the first coming of the Lord Jesus', we mean the whole period from His birth right through to His ascension. In the same way His second – and therefore His **return** – is a period in which He will be at work.

> Matthew 24:3
> And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

This concerns the events in the period leading up to 'the thousand years': at that time Satan is still 'the god of this world' (2 Corinthians 4:4), but he has been cast down out of heaven to the earth, and in that way room has been made for the Church. (Revelation 12) In that connection the term 'the sign of thy coming' – thy parousia, thy presence – is mentioned.

2 Thessalonians 2:2
That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.
'As that the day of Christ is at hand' sets us on the wrong track because our language has changed over 350 years. 'At hand' here does not mean that that day will soon come, but that that day is already present, 'has already begun'. The point is: 'as though the day of the Lord had already started'.
The believers in Thessalonica were being persecuted. They were 'shaken', that is, thrown off balance, 'shaken in mind', by 'spirit' – that is, by evil spirits – or by 'word' (preaching), or by 'letter as from us', in other words by teaching in black and white, written letters which were circulating with lies and deceit, as though they were from Paul himself.
In their fright they thought that the Day of the Lord had already begun.
What the apostle sets out here is actually very simple. He refers back to the statements in the Old Testament which all have to do with the things to come, and therefore with 'the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' in verse 1. That is how New Testament prophecy works. From Matthew right through to Revelation you have nothing other than a further explanation of what is already extensively set out in the Old Testament – though not yet sufficiently clearly.

In the Old Testament part of the prophecies is 'veiled', or 'hidden'; in the New Testament that veil is taken away. In the Old Testament things are described in a way that is still rather hard to understand; the New Testament quotes those same passages and explains to us what their full meaning really is.
The whole New Testament is occupied with revealing the mysteries of God. It is impossible to study or understand Revelation without the Old Testament prophets in general, and Daniel in particular. The same is true of the other prophetic passages in the New Testament – including Matthew 24, and certainly 2 Thessalonians 2, as well as 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5.

> Colossians 1:25–27
> Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

Paul's ministry is **not** to fulfil the prophecies by bringing them to pass. But prophecies are indeed 'the word of God'. 'To fulfil' here means that part of the Word of God was not yet full – that there were whole sections whose meaning we did not understand, so that they were in a sense 'empty' to us. The apostle's ministry is therefore to 'fulfil the word of God' by revealing 'the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints' – particularly through apostles and prophets, and especially through Paul.
The Church – you and I – and our present position in Christ, are by definition **hidden** in the Old Testament. If once you know the truth, because you have the light of the New Testament, you can find it back in the Old; but not otherwise.
We do not merely have 'prophetic words', but 'a more sure word of prophecy' (2 Peter 1:19–21) – the prophetic word as a whole. Which means you ought to lay the various prophetic statements alongside each other and compare them. One explains the other.

1 Corinthians 2:7–10

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:
Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.
But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

'The wisdom of God' in verse 7 is that mystery, even the hidden wisdom. There is a covering, a veil over it. That mystery is directly concerned with your glory and mine, as this verse says – and of course, in the first place, with the glory of Christ, but that includes His Body.
The 'princes of this world' did not know these things. They were there in the Old Testament, but not recognisable to them. God had a very good reason for writing them down in a way that could not be recognised beforehand: so that we could not afterwards claim to have a share in something that had no foundation in the Old Testament; and also because it is simply not wise to reveal your whole plan in advance to your enemies, as verse 8 shows.

2 Thessalonians 2:3

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

'Let no man deceive you' is the same warning as in Matthew 24 when the disciples ask: when shall these things be?

Matthew 24:4–5, 11, 24–25

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many..... For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect....Behold, I have told you before.

Apparently the chance that we could be deceived is quite real, and so we are warned. The adversary has every interest in leading us astray, so that we do not expect the rapture of the Church.

This 'falling away' (apostasy) stands in direct connection with Jerusalem. Only **after** that does the Day of the Lord begin. The 'falling away' is that of Daniel 9:27. In the second half of the seventieth week of Daniel, the one with whom the covenant was made 'shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease'.

Here too we are told that the Day of the Lord will not come 'except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition'. Two things are mentioned together because they are directly linked. The expression is not a reference to the 'prince that shall come', but to the unveiling of Satan himself on earth, after he has been cast out of heaven (Revelation 12).

In Daniel 8 this 'falling away' is described at some length in a prophecy which already had a historical application in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes (about 215–164 BC). Daniel 8 simply says that Israel – or a Jewish state – is handed over to, or plunged into, a particular form of idolatry in place of its own traditional religion, which there is rather coolly described as 'the daily sacrifice' (verses 12–13), because Jehovah did not have much to do with it.

This 'falling away' in Daniel 8 is already anticipated in Daniel 7, where we get an overview of the world-empires that would pass by from Daniel's day until the Messianic Kingdom – as also in Daniel 2, in Nebuchadnezzar's image. That apostasy, from God's side, is accompanied by great tribulation over the people; it brings 'sudden destruction' (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

The revelation of 'that man of sin' (literally 'the man of lawlessness') means that a man comes to power, but he receives his authority from 'the dragon'. In practice he receives it from the second beast of Revelation 13. That second beast, which comes up out of the earth, is called in Revelation 19:20 'the false prophet'. This is the antichrist: the devil, cast down to earth, in visible form; and according to Revelation 13:5 he speaks 'great things and blasphemies'. He will be the coming 'world teacher'.

2 Thessalonians 2:4

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

What is really in view here is not just any man. It is the figure who, only in the two Epistles of John, is called 'the antichrist'. There he is not presented as someone with direct political power, but as a false prophet with false teaching: lies that are spread abroad – and John ascribes these to 'that antichrist', to 'antichrists' (1 John 2:18), and to 'the spirit of antichrist' (1 John 4:3).
There are many antichrists, says John. That was already so in his day, and it sums up church history: a continual series of 'antichrists', one after another – people who seek to bring Christians under their power, to exercise lordship, and that in the place of Christ. This is in fact the practical outworking of the parable of the mustard seed that becomes a tree, in Matthew 13, where it speaks of the kingdom. That tree is completely identical to the tree in Daniel 4, where it is called Babylon.
The hearers of the Lord Jesus ought to have known that prophecy in Daniel. The Lord says in effect: it begins as the Kingdom of God, but in practice it becomes a monster – Babylon. The king of Babylon is the devil; and this antichrist is bound up with him in every way. I believe that official Christendom, as a world religion, is in large measure a satanic construction. It is Babylon, and practically speaking it pursues the same goals: first recognition, and then the pursuit of power.
'Antichrist' means 'a Christ in place of the Christ'. Not someone who fights against Christ, but someone who puts himself in the place of Christ and thus denies that Jesus is the Christ.
In Daniel 11, and in Revelation 12 and 13, we also read that this antichrist in practice presents himself as though he were God. He is a 'seducing spirit', as 1 Timothy 4:1 says:

> 1 Timothy 4:1
> Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

In 1 John 2:22 the word 'antichrist' is replaced by 'liar':

> 1 John 2:22
> Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:5**
> Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

This points back both to Paul's earlier teaching and to the Old Testament prophecies. The apostle had already spoken with them about these things and now writes: hold fast to them; do not let anyone rob you of them in any way.
Believers must know that God has given promises concerning the future. If we do not know that, then in practice we differ in nothing from the unbeliever, who has no idea where he is going. God is recognisable as God precisely because He always speaks about the future and about where salvation history is heading.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:6–7**
> And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.
> For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. Because of that little comma and the position of the word 'now', the whole becomes rather unclear in English. You could simply read it as: 'And what withholdeth ye know' – or, better: 'And now ye know what withholdeth.'

The idea is: ‘what is restraining him now, you know.’ That ‘restrainer’ was already at work in the days of the Thessalonians. The same expression appears again in the next verse, so you cannot simply miss it. The twofold ‘now’ in verses 6 and 7 stands over against the ‘then’ of verse 8, which refers to a specific future point in time.
So before the Day of the Lord, ‘that man of sin, the son of perdition’ must be revealed. But he cannot appear until something else has first taken place. There is something that restrains him: the presence of a ‘restrainer’. That is the Church, which at that time is still on earth. As long as that remains the case, he cannot come. Scripture plainly teaches that he will not be revealed as long as we are here.
The Bible tells us that Satan is cast out of heaven when the Church is caught up. That is entirely logical: if we are to be in heaven to rule the world, then he must be removed. This is a biblical teaching which does not leave any alternative open. It cannot be otherwise, because God Himself has set it down so in His Word.
Why is he restrained? What is the purpose? ‘That he might be revealed in his time.’ There is a time appointed. In 1 Thessalonians 5:1 these are ‘the times and the seasons’. The dates have been set by God. That is why I find it a little amusing that we are not able to calculate them. Until that time has come, this person – in terms of his public unveiling – is held back.
‘The mystery of iniquity’ – literally: of lawlessness – is that same ‘man of sin’ in verse 3. ‘Mystery’ is always the concealing of things which otherwise would be visible – including our entire present dispensation. In Ephesians 3 Paul speaks of ‘the dispensation of the mystery’, so that concealment is characteristic of our era, just as grace is; and you can indeed combine those two ideas. Where grace reigns, the King hides Himself.
People reproach God for hiding Himself – but God has a very good reason. The world ought to be glad; for if He were to start speaking again, it would not go well: His words would bring judgement on the world.
‘Doth already work’ means: that lawlessness is already active in the world. The antichrist, the devil, is already active; only in the future will he appear on earth in human form and manifest himself visibly. The same is true of Babylon, which likewise bears the name ‘Mystery’. It is already at work now, but not yet revealed. You can find Babylon ultimately everywhere; it works covertly.

> Revelation 17:5
> And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

This is a vision of the last world empire, of which Babylon is the capital. The power of Babylon, and of that antichrist, has been active secretly throughout the ages. Only in the future will that power be visibly expressed and literally manifest on earth – in that city Babylon, as in ancient times.
That kingdom of Satan in the hidden sphere continues throughout our present dispensation until Satan and his ‘staff’ are cast down to the earth.
In verse 7 of 2 Thessalonians 2 quite a few words have been supplied by the translators, presumably thinking that otherwise we would not understand it. But if you remove those additions, something very straightforward emerges – and there is nothing difficult about it: ‘he who now letteth … until he be out of the midst’ is actually clear enough.
The Greek expression ‘out of the midst’ normally means ‘out from among’, ‘from the midst of’, in the sense of ‘from among the people’. ‘Is there anyone in our midst who …’

does not mean exactly in the centre of the room, but 'among us'. The restrainer finds himself in the midst of, or among, the nations.
So: 'He that now restraineth, until he be out of the midst' – that is, until he is no longer among them. The extra 'taken away' is really over-complete. It is courteous to include it in translation, but Paul is not being courteous here; he is brief and to the point, almost in telegram style. Words which add nothing to the thought are simply left out.
The man of sin, the son of perdition, would gladly be revealed and wants everyone to know his name and give him the honour he claims for himself. For that he must make himself known – but God does not yet allow him to do so. Not as long as the Church is on earth and the Lord still has a work in hand, gathering from this world those who love the truth.
Only when the Lord begins to reveal His Kingdom is Satan permitted to appear openly as well, and then the conflict is fought out in public.
In verse 1 the apostle has announced that in this chapter he is speaking about 'the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' – that is, the return of Christ in the broad sense of the term – and that includes 'our gathering together unto him', the rapture of the Church.
The phrase 'until he be taken out of the way' in verse 7 is the only expression in this passage in which I see that 'gathering together unto Him' actually described. If that phrase did **not** refer to the rapture, we would be left with verse 1, where the apostle said he would be speaking of it – and then never does. This, then, is really the heart of it.
The point is not merely to give a description of what will happen in the future. The essential point is that the Day of the Lord does **not** come as long as we are here. Indeed: before that Day comes, first there is the apostasy; before that, the revelation of the man of lawlessness; and before that, the rapture of the Church.
So as long as we are here, we never need to let anyone frighten us into thinking that the Day of the Lord, or the great tribulation, has already begun.
There may be another reason why people do not see the 'he' in verse 7 as the Church. 'He' is masculine, and since the majority of believers see the Church as a woman – 'the bride' who will soon go to meet the Bridegroom – they do not even consider that 'he' might be the Church. Then, so they reason, it would have to say 'until she be taken out of the way'.
But precisely in connection with the rapture we should not think of the Church as a woman, still less as a bride, but as a Man, as the Son, because the rapture of the Church is the moment when the Church is placed as heir.
This is also the explanation of why the rapture is mentioned so seldom in Scripture: twice in Thessalonians and once in 1 Corinthians 15. These passages indeed deal with the rapture, but then with respect to the bodily resurrection of the believers who remain alive. The essence of the rapture, however, is that we believers who are now living on earth receive once for all a glorified body – preferably 'clothed upon', even 'over-clothed' (2 Corinthians 5:4).
The believers of our dispensation who have died before us are waiting for that one day just as much as we are.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:8**
> And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

If verse 7 says ‘until he be taken out of the way’ – in reality: until he ‘arises out of the midst’ – and verse 8 continues ‘and then shall that Wicked be revealed’, it is only logical that there are two events here.
The next point on God’s calendar is the rapture of the Church. Only afterwards does the work with respect to the earth continue. Christ and the Church will begin a work in the world, towards the world. The Lord then takes, claims (Psalm 2), the rule – and that means that the one who until then exercised that rule will be removed from his position (Revelation 12). He then disappears from heaven.
In the very period when the Church is to fulfil a function in heaven, Satan, in the person of the antichrist, will carry on his work on earth.
The traditional misunderstanding of this verse is that people think the ‘church system’ – including church law and discipline – exists in order to restrain and fight against wickedness in the world. That is certainly not so. That is not the Church’s task. We read nowhere that the Church is to fight or restrain the devil or his work.
It is not about restraining wickedness as such, but about restraining the revelation of the wicked one, of the antichrist. That is what is explicitly stated.
Once the revelation of that wicked one has taken place and he manifests himself, the Lord will ultimately ‘consume [him] with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy [him] with the brightness of his coming.’
The parallel phrase ‘with the brightness of his coming’ means: in those days the Lord will destroy him simply by speaking (Psalm 2) – in contrast with the present time in which we live. Now we are living in the time of the great silence of God – ‘The Silence of God’, as Sir Robert Anderson called it. God is silent in our dispensation; He hides Himself.
In the future He will reveal Himself. The ‘coming of the Son of man’ in Matthew 24 is quite a long period – about forty years. The term is generally applied to the days from the rapture of the Church until the thousand years. The ‘coming of the Son of man’ ends, according to the Bible, with a judgement from God upon everything that lives on earth – including this ‘man of sin’, this ‘son of perdition’.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:9**
> Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

The word ‘coming’ (Greek: parousia), which literally means ‘presence’, ‘being present’, is used in verse 8 of the Lord Jesus, and in verse 9 of the antichrist. Both will manifest themselves visibly on earth, but also in a spiritual sense. On the one hand you have the building up of that final world empire, with Babylon as its capital; on the other, the building up of the final Kingdom of Christ, with Jerusalem as its capital.
The presence of Satan is accompanied by ‘all power and signs and lying wonders’. The prophecy in Deuteronomy speaks about this and will then be relevant again – just as, in fact, it already is in our own days.

> Deuteronomy 13:1–5
> If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love

> the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.

It may happen that people come with some kind of message, and with some god whom one ought supposedly to serve – and they let that message be accompanied by a sign or a wonder. That means that signs and wonders do not necessarily come from God. That seems to me a serious enough warning.

Here it is foretold that someone else – an antichrist – will make use of signs and wonders to give his message entry. What is said here to Israel through Moses is that they must not pay attention to the signs and wonders, but to the message.

> Revelation 13:13–14
> And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

Here the antichrist is spoken of literally. The ‘second beast’, the ‘false prophet’, will perform this sort of miracles, and so this fits exactly into the description of Deuteronomy 13.

Such signs and wonders will also occur before the rapture of the Church. The figure of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8 is almost legendary, and in church history he appears in still more elaborate form. He, too, did signs and wonders – but that does not mean that the message he preached was the Word of God.

In the case of the Lord Jesus it was, of course, different. That has to do with the nature of the signs He performed, and the way in which He did them. We should not conclude from the miracles, but from the message itself, that it is biblical. It is about the message, not the show around it.

Nevertheless people are very susceptible to it – sadly also in Christian circles. They prefer signs and wonders to the Word of God.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:10**
> And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

In practice it is so that where there is love for the truth, the truth will be found – and that is probably how you and I came to be saved: because we were seeking truth. Then we found Him who is the Truth, ‘that we may know him that is true’, the ‘true God’.

> 1 John 5:20
> And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

So it is about love for the truth. You know what Romans says:

Romans 3:11

There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

No one seeks God – but there are those who seek the truth. And what do they find? God. People are lost 'because they received not the love of the truth'. And that, even though in the days of His coming the Truth – the Gospel – will in fact be preached throughout the whole world:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

It may be that in our days there are people who have never heard; but in those days it will apparently be so that everyone will have heard. Across the whole world, among all nations, the Gospel will again be preached. If people then reject it, well, then they are simply not 'saved', and remain among those 'that perish'.

2 Thessalonians 2:11

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

I am inclined to take the word 'power/energy' here as pointing to a person. That figure, 'that man of sin' in verse 3, the same as 'that Wicked' in verse 8, is also the same as this 'strong delusion'.

The word used here (energeia, 'energy') is used in Scripture only for a supernatural, more-than-human power – a higher power or authority. That may be the power of God, as manifested in Christ – and so you arrive at a person, not at a thing.

I also think it is important that humanity should meet the devil directly, in whom people scarcely believe at all. That the world should be confronted with that figure who, since time immemorial, has been 'the prince of this world', 'the god of this world'. Then it will become clear that he is the one who has always directed the course of affairs in the world – and not man.

God Himself will send them 'strong delusion, that they should believe a lie'. That is how it works: if people reject the Lord, they will believe the lie – 'because they received not the love of the truth', as verse 10 says. The point is: they reject the truth, and then they follow the lie.

One misunderstanding is that we ought to be attacking the lie. We should not! The Church is 'the pillar and ground of the truth'.

1 Timothy 3:15

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

That is something fundamentally different. We are not primarily against something, but for something. It is about learning the Truth – and then we are immune to the lie. Knowing the Truth is enough to recognise the lie. When we then encounter it, we at once push it aside.

One of the Bible-school teachers once asked: what do our young people know about Mohammedanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and all the rest? They wanted to introduce those as subjects in Bible schools – 'instruction in the world religions'. My Someone very aptly replied: 'Fortunately, nothing.' I agree with him. I see no point in it. It is a waste of time. You must know the Truth – then you can discern the lie.

I believe that in those future days people will all be confronted with the Gospel, and that we, as the Church, shall be involved in that. Then people must choose – make a direct choice, just as we in our days must do.
In our time these things are still invisible, and people can shrug their shoulders and walk away. They think they do not have to choose. But even now the Lord Jesus' word applies:

> Luke 11:23
> He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.

In the days described here everything will be brought into the open, and people will not be able to turn their heads away. They will have to choose.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:12**
> That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Of course the lie comes with temptation – that is, it comes in a subtle, refined way. We too, in our days, are easily drawn along by all sorts of teachings. All that theorising and philosophising of men, all that man invents, leads him nowhere, Scripture teaches. It may be interesting, but that is as far as it goes.

> Colossians 2:8
> Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

It is called philosophy when God plays no part in it; and when the Word of God does play some role in the story, it is then called religion – or perhaps theology, but in practice it amounts to the same thing. It springs from what man himself thinks out.
All that philosophising is, in essence, vain – empty – because it is of no real use. It is deceit, because it sweeps you along, but does not bring you to Christ.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:13**
> But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

The apostle is generally thankful for the fruit of his own labour. It is a reason for anyone to be thankful when you see that the work you are doing actually bears fruit – or better still, that the Lord's work is going forward.
Paul in any case concludes that these Thessalonians are 'beloved of the Lord'. That cannot be otherwise: they are 'the church … in God our Father', as in 1:1. They are believers, children of God, and 'from the beginning chosen … to salvation'.
God is the One who chose. The question is: whom did He choose? The answer is: you. That is what the sentence actually says – namely, that 'God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth'.
This verse is used to support the traditional 'doctrine of election'. It is said that God has, from the beginning, individually singled out people: this one I take, that one I shall take later, when they are grown up, or when they are born, or when they reach adulthood. That is a popular theory, especially in the Western society, and it is considered thoroughly 'orthodox', that is, 'faithful to the doctrine'.
But not to the biblical doctrine – for the Bible does not teach it in that way. It does teach that God determined from the beginning that believers would receive eternal life. If you

come to faith, you belong to those believers. One should therefore come to faith, and on that ground share in God's election.
The word 'elect' is not quite used here, but 'chosen' certainly is. Yet it has nothing at all to do with that doctrinal construction as such. The point is that those who are 'beloved of the Lord' – because they are children of God – are chosen to salvation, and not in the narrow sense, but in the broad sense of the term.
'Salvation' does not only mean that one is born again – for that they already were. The word is always used of everything God gives us, especially as believers – and that is far more than eternal life alone.
That salvation is at once explained: 'through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth'. Here three of those great terms stand together.

> 2 Peter 1:3–4
> According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Peter says exactly what Paul does: that after we have been born again and become children of God, we are called.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:14**
> Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has called us as believers not only to eternal life, but more than that – to glory, and to the obtaining of 'the exceeding great and precious promises'. To us, as children of God living under the New Covenant, further promises have been made – promises concerning glory, the birthright of the firstborn, the inheritance, the placing as sons of God (Romans 8).
People come to faith. But you cannot realistically expect someone who has just come to faith to know the whole truth at that moment. That is not so – and we see it in practice, because many believers have little interest in the further truth. They have learned something from the Bible; you may be glad of that. But if it stays there, then there is, afterwards, not much reason to be glad.
We ought to increase in these things, as the Lord Jesus said to His contemporaries:

> John 8:31–32
> Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

The Truth would evidently do a complete work in the believer – that is what it comes down to in practice. We ought to grow in the knowledge of the Truth; there should be spiritual growth.
We live in a privileged position, in New Testament times, in which eternal life has been brought into being in the resurrection of Christ.
The thrust of verses 13 and 14 is that we, who are children of God, are also chosen to salvation with respect to the soul – that is, with respect to our walk. We ought to learn to believe the truth – not merely in the sense of a one-off acceptance, but in the sense of trusting the Truth. Not trusting man, or 'princes', as Psalm 118 says, but the Lord, His

Word and His promises – and thus the work that He is presently doing. For that is what He has called us to, says verse 14.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:15**
> Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

'So then' means it is a conclusion from what has just been said. It is addressed to 'brethren' – that is, those who are already saved in the other sense, who are already 'sanctified in Christ Jesus'; born-again people.
'So then, brethren, stand…' The translators evidently did not think that strong enough and added 'fast'. It does not change the sense, for the idea is that we should stand – and therefore go on standing.
It is the same thought as in Ephesians 6, which is likewise a conclusion from what precedes:

> Ephesians 6:10–11, 14
> Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

The word 'brethren' in essence has the meaning of 'fellow-heirs'. A son is an heir; a brother is therefore a co-heir. The apostle uses the term at times in that specific sense.
The life of Christ is meant to be lived in us. We ought to become strong in that way, and in that connection we are to put on 'the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand'. In that way we stand 'against the wiles of the devil'. The devil always wants to get us onto side-paths. Sometimes I have the impression that all those movements, all those new directions we Christians are expected to take, are nothing but 'the wiles of the devil' to draw us away from the Truth.
We should simply ignore them. We ought to put on 'the whole armour of God', and then we are able to stand. That is what 'standing' means here – holding our ground. In 1 Corinthians 15 this is called being stedfast:

> 1 Corinthians 15:58
> Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

'Unmoveable' is essentially the same as 'stedfast', and we are so by 'always abounding in the work of the Lord'.
Verse 15 also says: 'hold the traditions which ye have been taught'. As English people with a Calvinistic background (though I do not recognise myself in that), we tend at once to think of laws. But this word 'traditions' simply means 'things handed down' – literally so.
In English we would call them traditions. A tradition is something that goes from hand to hand – trade is, after all, handing over. Traditions pass from one generation to the next. It is therefore not about fixed regulations imposed by law, but about a way of life or practice that has been handed down to us. The next generation takes its example from the previous one.
These 'traditions' are transmitted, not because they have been imposed through law, but because they are customary – and always because they are taken from Scripture

and arise from the Word that dwells in us. They have to do with the reign of grace. We are not imprisoned by these traditions; they belong to us. They have been 'handed over' to us; and then comes the exhortation:

> Galatians 5:1
> Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

What are these 'traditions' that have been handed down to us? If we compare this with 1 Corinthians 15, we see that it is about how we ought to serve the Lord – that we are to be involved in 'the work of the Lord', that is, the building up of the Body of Christ.

> Ephesians 5:25–27
> Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The building up of the Church is His work, which He began 'when he had by himself purged our sins' (Hebrews 1:3). He is still doing that work: the building, cleansing, gathering and training of the Church – and thus of you and me as individual believers.
Then the intention is that we should serve one another in love. Also because 'the servant is not greater than his lord' (John 13:16). The Lord Himself serves the Church, and then the servant – the believer – cannot lag behind, of course. We serve one another.
Or, as John teaches: we should love one another. To 'love' in practice means to serve. There is more to it: it is serving on the basis of a bond. That is the real definition of 'to love'.
The Greek word agapē, which we translate as love, means 'serving on the basis of fellowship', because we are joined to one another. To love means: to have fellowship, and from there to bear one another's burdens. That is service for the building up of the Body of Christ – serving the Church.
From our 'standing in grace' – accepting and living in the grace shown to us – we learn to show grace. In this we are 'followers of Christ'.
By 'hold the traditions which ye have been taught' Paul evidently means the preaching of what has been spoken. 'Our epistle' is, in any case, a reference to 1 Thessalonians, where it says, among other things, what the will of God is – namely, 'even your sanctification' (4:3).
The content of Paul's preaching is, naturally, the same as the content of his letters. He is undoubtedly referring back to verse 2 of this chapter: 'that ye be not soon shaken in mind'. In verse 15 the apostle returns to this. He is effectively saying: do not let yourselves be thrown off balance. We live in the dispensation of grace, and we are not expecting the revelation of the man of lawlessness, but the rapture of the Church. We are therefore expecting glory. That is certain.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:16–17**
> Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

You could hardly say it more emphatically. It is a threefold expression: He Himself, our Lord – namely 'our God and Father' – for in practice there is no difference between

them. Whatever God does, He does through His Son, who is here called ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’.
It is the same construction as in Titus 2:

> Titus 2:13–14
> Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

There too it is not two different persons. It is One. That glory is from God and comes to us in the Person of our Saviour Jesus Christ. And then it says: ‘Who gave himself for us …’
In Titus 2 the work He does with us is also described, namely ‘that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people’. That purifying is the same as the sanctification of 2 Thessalonians 2:13. We also read there ‘zealous of good works’ – and that is exactly where 2 Thessalonians 2:17 ends: that He may ‘stablish you in every good word and work.’
These are the ‘good works’ of Ephesians 2 – not our own achievements, but the works which God has before prepared for us, that we should walk in them, as those who live out of ‘everlasting consolation and good hope through grace’.

> 1 Peter 1:3
> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
> 1 Peter 1:4
> To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,
> Titus 2:13
> Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

A ‘good hope’ is a ‘lively hope’ in 1 Peter 1:3 and a ‘blessed hope’ in Titus 2:13. It is an incorruptible, undefiled and unfading inheritance, which is reserved in heaven for us. This ‘good hope’ is the hope of the completion of ‘the sanctification of the Spirit’ from verse 13 (see 1 Peter 1:4).
‘Everlasting consolation and good hope’ both point to the future. ‘Consolation’ means encouragement or strengthening. The Comforter in the biblical sense is the One who gives help. Encouragement and courage are needed not merely for the present, but especially for the future.
Where a believer loses heart, that is presumably (I draw that conclusion) because such a person is not truly standing in grace. If one continues in that grace, one receives from God consolation, good hope, encouragement, --. Ultimately it is all about ‘help in time of need’:

> Hebrews 4:16
> Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.
> write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

> **2 Thessalonians 3:1–2**
> Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and

be glorified, even as it is with you: 2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

The Word should go forward; it should spread. But that is certainly not the only intention. 'That the word of the Lord may have free course' also means that it should run its course in your life and mine personally. It starts with the ears, comes into the head and into the heart, and takes root there. It is planted there.

It makes our 'souls' – that is, our manner of life – blessed; and where one lives out of that faith, the Word also 'has free course'. So it really is about the working-out of the Word in the believers themselves. For that we should pray, it says here. In this way prayer serves, first and foremost, to make us conscious of these things.

The function of prayer is at least this: that we recognise our own position, realise it, and express it in words towards Him. In itself it is an encouragement to know that there are people who are willing to pray for you. That gives support, because you know that you are not in reality standing alone.

It is also the intention that 'we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men'. This is about people who are out of place. If you are fit for something, you are in the right place; if you are unfit or out of order, you find yourself in the wrong place.

In practice we are not really removed from such people; instead, we learn to stand firm in spite of the 'unreasonable and wicked men'. That is sometimes no easy matter, I freely admit. The question is to what extent they hold us captive, and how we can withdraw ourselves from that influence.

There are believers with whom we are spiritually joined, and yet in practice hardly at all – because, apparently, they either have no real, or else a very different, expectation concerning the future. Verse 2 says: 'for all men have not faith', in the sense that not all are faithful. They may be believers, to some extent at least, but in the practical outworking of life it evidently looks different. Given such circumstances, it is often better that the ways part.

Over against that stands the fact that the Lord is faithful to His Word.

2 Thessalonians 3:3–4

But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

We have the Lord's promise that He will give us the strength to stand, so that 'the evil one' can do nothing against us – for the Lord will 'keep you from evil'. He gives us strength that goes beyond our own strength, or our lack of it.

We therefore choose to be faithful to the Lord (verse 4), and when that goes beyond our own strength, well then, He gives us what we need for it. That, in fact, is the secret of the Christian life.

We are meant to live the life of Christ; and in that situation the Lord gives us what we need. That includes material matters, things to do with the flesh, physical and earthly things, as far as they are necessary.

But it is not the case that, because one is a believer, one can claim material blessings. When, however, we acknowledge Him as Lord, we do receive from Him what is necessary for our service. We receive what is needed to stand, or simply put: we receive strength from Him.

We shall be faithful to the Word, and then to the traditions handed down (2:15). The apostle says, 'I am confident that you are doing this', and then adds in verse 5:

> **2 Thessalonians 3:5**
> And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

The apostle takes a step back. First he says: I ask this of you, and I am confident that you do it; and then he says: but (or yet), it is the Lord who will do it.
It is the Lord who 'direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ'. As His Word gains a place in our hearts – that is, in our lives – it will shape our mindset in proportion, and it will direct our inner man towards the love of God, towards fellowship with God.
We ought to be conscious of this; to submit ourselves to it; to be faithful in it on our side. He is the One who is at work, and He wishes to continue this work.

> **2 Thessalonians 3:6**
> Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

'We command' has the sense of instructing. It is a strong exhortation, because it is given 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'.
The instruction is 'that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly'. The word 'disorderly' corresponds to 'unfit' or 'out of order' in verse 2. In practice it comes to the same thing.
It does not say that we are to excommunicate disorderly brothers. That might in some cases be necessary, but it is not the general rule within our local fellowship of believers. The normal way of things is that we draw to ourselves those who are weak in the faith (Romans 14; Galatians 6).
But there are also those who want to remain weak, and promote that attitude. Such belong in this category. Then 'they walk disorderly', and we ought to withdraw from them, so that we do not start walking disorderly ourselves. Sometimes there is nothing else for it.
And it is also the case that we are to do this on a personal basis. Not first sit together and discuss it with everyone. This is a personal decision in our personal lives. If you do not wish to be involved with a certain way of life or a certain approach to biblical matters, then you must withdraw from it, because we ought to be faithful to the Lord.
As far as we draw to ourselves those who are weak in the faith, we do so in order that they may come to walk in an orderly way, and no longer be unfit.
This instruction at least means that we are not to preserve outward unity at all costs. 'For all men have not faith' (verse 2). We are expected to be faithful, and not to let anything hinder us in that.
'That ye withdraw yourselves' has, to be clear, nothing to do with whether someone is allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. It has to do with our practical dealings with one another – or, more strongly still, with those we work together with. We ought to take this to heart, and withdraw from every brother who does not walk 'after the tradition which he received of us'.

‘A good hope’ is ‘a lively hope’ in 1 Peter 1:3 and ‘that blessed hope’ in Titus 2:13. It is an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, which is reserved in heaven for us. That ‘good hope’ is the hope of the completion of ‘the sanctification of the Spirit’ from verse 13. (1 Peter 1:4)
‘Consolation and good hope’ point to the future. ‘Consolation’ means ‘encouragement’ or ‘strengthening’. The ‘Comforter’ is, in the biblical sense, ‘the One who gives help’. Encouragement and courage are needed, not so much for the present, as for the future. Where a believer loses heart, that is presumably (I draw that conclusion) because such a person is not truly standing in grace. If one really stands in that grace, one receives from God consolation, good hope, encouragement, strengthening. In the end it is all about ‘help in time of need’. (Hebrews 4:16)

2 Thessalonians 3:7
For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

This principle is mentioned a few more times in what follows. Then it is described what this more or less looks like in practice.

2 Thessalonians 3:8
Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

‘Chargeable’ is ‘being a burden’. That is, letting someone else carry the cost. Because Scripture says so, I say it too: we should do something for one another, so in principle I have no problem with that. But there are always some who are nothing but a burden. Everyone must constantly arrange and provide things for them. Such people are therefore not followers of Paul. It should be clear that those ‘who walk disorderly’ are, for example, those who do ‘eat any man’s bread for nought’ and thus are indeed ‘chargeable’ to others.
How we actually deal with these things is again a personal matter and not immediately a collective one. We are, after all, all different. It is, however, a serious matter, for the simple reason that such people can take a large part of our time, even our life, away from us. Under all circumstances we should ask ourselves to what extent something makes us unfaithful to the ministry or to the ‘race’ we are to run. I know there are things that cross my path about which I say outright: I am not doing that, convinced that I should not do it. Simply because I am not the right man for it and because I have more useful things to do. I do not, for example, go on home visits. It costs me too much of my time, my thinking, and it would be at the expense of Bible study and preaching. Others must therefore do that. By which I have said at once that this lies very differently for each one of us.
Paul’s example to follow is that he provided for his own livelihood. He uses such expressions also in other letters, from which in any case it appears that he preferred to do it this way, because this is the norm for every believer. One should provide for one’s own needs. Elsewhere it says that one should also provide for others who cannot do so themselves. Ephesians 4:28: ‘Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.’ That is our first responsibility as believers.

2 Thessalonians 3:9

Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

Paul says: there is nothing legally wrong with living from the preaching of the gospel, or however you may call it. I also have that right, but it is not a duty. And therefore, he says, I have not acted so, 'to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us'. The first responsibility of believers is that they have their own life in order and in that do not burden anyone else. They should run their own household and not allow problems from their private life to become a burden upon the brethren or the sisters. Sometimes it does happen and cannot be helped, but it should not be so by design.

2 Thessalonians 3:10

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

Paul writes these things now, but he apparently said it already in this way when he was with them. It therefore falls into the category of 'the traditions which ye have been taught' of chapter 2:15. It is the basic principle for believers that 'if any would not work, neither should he eat.' How do you know that someone does not want to work? You know that when you offer him work and he does not do it. It is not about social arrangements, but about how things should go amongst believers themselves.
It is simply bad for a person to have nothing to do. A human being is by definition a servant and should be doing service. If you are not, then that is very bad for your health, both physically and spiritually.

2 Thessalonians 3:11

For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

This 'we hear' was thus a reason for this letter. 'Work', in Scripture and probably also in old English, has always meant 'working for pay'. There is some return for it. 'Labour' means 'doing heavy work', and suffering is attached to that. 'Busybodies' means that they are busy with all sorts of things and everywhere. That is the sense of the Greek expression. The English phrase is 'to work all around': being occupied with everything and always busy with all kinds of things—useless things. 'They are busy bodies.'
This also happens in so-called Christian work. People are busy with anything and everything. This good work and that good work. 'We surely must do this, we surely must do that.' It costs enormous amounts of time, energy, effort—and what is it all for?

2 Thessalonians 3:12

Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

The thought behind 'busybodies' is that people thereby make themselves important. But they should 'with quietness' work; that is, do that work unobtrusively. Work is not intended as a demonstration. The point is that reasonably useful things are done and that one, according to Ecclesiastes, finds one's satisfaction and joy in that. But the work itself does not have to be demonstrative in the sense of 'Just look at us being busy; at least we are doing something!'

A brother once said to me: ‘You know a lot about the Bible, but at least we are doing something.’ As a result of ‘working with quietness’ each one ‘eats their own bread’. Ecclesiastes teaches us that we should eat our bread and drink our wine with joy and gladness.
‘Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.’ (Ecclesiastes 9:7)
This means that one should go through life with joy and peace. I always think that believers are the only ones for whom it could truly succeed. They really find peace in their life, in their service, in their existence.
It is all meant so that man should have a balanced life. Riches without having to do anything for it only makes a person decadent. Hard work without receiving anything for it is also very bad for a person. One should find the balance in that.
These are ideals that perhaps are not one hundred per cent attainable, but believe me, one can come a long way in that direction. Simply do your work, run your race. I do not make a distinction between the old man and the new man here. The principle is the same and remains the same. One should run one’s race, do one’s work, organise one’s life, and see to it that one can provide for oneself. One should find one’s joy in that. One may even enjoy it ‘in this present world’, Paul writes to Timothy. Only when we have our own life in order can we from there truly mean something for others.

2 Thessalonians 3:13

But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.

This begins the final words of the letter. We should not ‘become faint-hearted’; that is another translation of ‘be not weary’. The word occurs in Hebrews 12:3:
‘For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.’
There it concerns the practice of the Christian life in which we should be faithful to the Lord and truly ‘run with patience the race that is set before us’. (Hebrews 12:1) We should do that, according to verse 2, ‘Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith…’.
Then I always think of that little motto on a plaque: ‘God has not promised us a calm journey, but a safe arrival.’ But here it says: ‘be not weary in well doing’, because we are born again precisely for that purpose. We should ‘walk in good works, which God hath before ordained’, says Ephesians 2:10:
‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.’
We have already dwelt on this earlier, because it was said in 2:16,17:
‘And our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlastingh consolation and good hope through grace,
Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.’
And again:
‘Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.’ (1 Corinthians 15:58)
With that we are back at our subject, because this statement follows immediately upon the exposition about the catching away of the Church.

2 Thessalonians 3:14

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

Now Paul becomes really ‘sharp’, that is, the whole thing comes to a point, and a point is sharp—that is the intention. It is so here. The word ‘written’ is not even there, which makes it stronger still, because the apostle does not point to general guidelines or instructions, but limits himself to this letter. ‘Note that man’ means ‘mark him’, so that we will ‘have no company with him’, it says. Not in order to be nasty to that other person, but that we ourselves might remain faithful. We encounter someone who is not faithful; we know this, and we take account of it; we keep our distance from him. Sometimes literally, sometimes only figuratively, but nevertheless that is what it says. ‘That he may be ashamed’ is the intention, but the first thought is of course ‘that he may be preserved’. We should not take everything in, because it can be bad for our spiritual health. That is the subject here as well. We should keep ourselves far away from certain things; that is why it is stated so strongly. In connection with the content of this letter it concerns judgment for the unbelievers and, on the other hand, reward for the believers. ‘That he may be ashamed’ means that he comes to repentance, that he faces reality.

2 Thessalonians 3:15

Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

He is indeed an ‘enemy’, because he behaves so, but that does not mean we should treat him as such. In practice, of course, it is often the other way round. Those of whom it speaks often regard us as enemies. Children of God are used by the enemy, the evil one, to hinder the work of the Lord. Paul writes of this in:

‘And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.’ (Galatians 2:4)

They are brethren, and we should regard them as such, but nevertheless we should ‘mark’ them for ourselves with ‘beware, keep clear’. ‘Do not allow yourself to be influenced; do not mingle with them.’ That does not mean you cannot sit with them at the Lord’s Supper, for that can be done, precisely because we regard them as brethren and not as enemies from our side. But we are warned.

‘But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.’ (Titus 3:9–11)

That probably belongs with ‘busybodies’ (verse 11). When people bring certain teachings which, to the best of our knowledge and in good conscience, are contrary to Scripture, it does not simply say: ‘reject that doctrine’, but also: ‘reject such a man’. All kinds of unbiblical teachings come to us from people who call themselves Christians, but who, in the biblical sense of the word, most likely are not at all. They are not born again. So the issue is the person in question. It is apparently that serious, for the simple reason that otherwise we will still be influenced. Perhaps not even by taking over such a ‘heretical doctrine’, but perhaps because we are constantly busy refuting it. That is not exactly sensible either. In that way the devil also lays hold on us. And so: ‘reject such a man’.

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.

'The Lord of peace' refers to 'fellowship', and that is again 'unity'. That unity is experienced where we are separated from those who by definition bring about division. Believers should be one, but on the right basis: their faithfulness to the Lord and thus their faithfulness to the word of the Lord.

To bring about that unity, we should not therefore turn away from the Bible or from the Word of the Lord. On the contrary, we should join ourselves (have fellowship) with those who are faithful to the Lord, who love the Word and the brethren. That loving can happen in different ways, this verse says: 'always by all means'. That differs from person to person and also according to the circumstances, but the Lord will give that peace.

There are, however, some verses before this that remind us of our own personal responsibilities. We may expect things from the Lord, but not unconditionally. He expects something from us first, and on that basis He gives to us.

2 Thessalonians 3:17

The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.

This time Paul writes with his own hand; it is his own handwriting. That means that the rest of the letter was dictated. The apostle Paul apparently needed someone to read to him and someone to write for him. To authenticate his letter, he now does so with his own handwriting, because from of old that is regarded as a personal mark.

There were letters in circulation that were attributed to the apostle Paul, of which he says: I did not write them. That was in chapter 2:2. Hence: 'The salutation of Paul with mine own hand.' This personal signature is used in all his letters, so that they know the writing really is from Paul.

2 Thessalonians 3:18

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

I am always glad of such a closing, because it always brings again the same great New Testament reality under words: namely, that we are not living under the law, that we are not prisoners, but on the contrary that we have been placed in liberty, stand in grace, and should remain standing there.

Both the first and the second letter to the Thessalonians begin with identical blessings of peace and grace:

'Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.' (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2)

Receiving 'peace' and (or namely) 'grace' from God are the essential characteristics of the New Covenant and thus of the Christian life.

If we are willing to run the race that the Lord has set before us, if we are willing to walk in the 'good works which God hath before ordained' (Ephesians 2:10)—which is, of course, the same thing—then we live out of His grace. Then we 'rejoice in hope of the glory of God':

'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' (Romans 5:1, 2)
Amen.

END NOTES

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. [1 Thess.5:1]
I believe the apostle Paul had been with the 'brethren' (that is, the fellow–heirs in Christ) at Thessalonica shortly before writing these two letters. He must have spoken there about the Plan of God, about the practical life of believers ('brotherly love'), about standing firm in His Word, and about the believer's expectation of the future on the way to glory.
That is why, several times, he writes that it is 'not needful' to write to them about certain subjects – and yet he does write about them, often briefly, as a reminder of what had already been discussed. That has been of benefit to all believers who have read and studied these church epistles of Paul ever since.
For example, from these letters we learn what the purpose is of coming to faith in Christ: For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: [1 Thess.4:3] That is really the main subject of the letter.
The Thessalonian letters are best known for what they say about 'the future of the Church', more specifically about 'the rapture of the Church':
Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. [1 Thess.4:17]
The question comes up: what about 'we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord', and what about those 'which are asleep'? Paul writes that he does not want them – and so us, either – to be ignorant about this. In the closing verses of chapter 4 he explains briefly how it is. Then in chapter 5 it becomes clear that they apparently already know quite a lot about 'the times and the seasons', especially those surrounding 'the day of the Lord', because they are not in 'darkness'. They knew about these things. For a believer it is of great importance to know what the future looks like, what we are to expect.
The believers at Thessalonica were clearly 'afflicted' by 'the tempter'. They were 'troubled', 'shaken', 'deceived', 'as that the day of Christ was at hand', as though the day of the Lord had already begun. The adversary has an interest in this, so that believers are not expecting 'the rapture of the Church'. Paul must also have explained this matter during his stay with them. Strictly speaking, it 'ought not to be necessary' to repeat it, but he does so anyway, albeit briefly, 'in telegram style', so that they would not forget. Paul writes that the 'man of sin' must first be revealed. That has not yet happened – not then, and not now. And then Paul says: 'And now ye know what withholdeth …'

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. [1 Thes.1:1]
So far as we know, 'Silvanus' is simply Silas, for it was Paul, Silas and Timotheus who were all three involved in preaching the gospel in Thessalonica. 'Silvanus' is just the more formal version of the name Silas. The meaning is essentially the same: 'the chosen' or 'the elect one'.

These three had preached in Thessalonica, and once they were together again, these letters were written from Corinth in quick succession. The readers were assumed already to know a great deal about the prophetic Word. Clearly it did not go very deep yet, and that is why these letters were written immediately.
Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.
The order of Paul's letters:
The order of the letters in the Bible is not the order in which they were written. That would not serve much purpose, and none of the letters is dated. They are arranged according to content. The Thessalonian letters stand at the end of Paul's church epistles because they deal with the future of the Church. Personally, I think that in reality 1 Thessalonians is the second Thessalonian letter, and 2 Thessalonians the first. It is possible that they were placed in this order because of the expression in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 'I would not have you to be ignorant…', from which people conclude that they were ignorant on this subject. But just half a page further on we read:
For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. [1 Thes.5:2] I therefore have the impression that they were not ignorant at all, but that they were beginning to forget – just as it happens in our own day. Because the apostle wanted to make sure they would remember it, he sets it down once more in black and white.
A very strong argument that 2 Thessalonians is actually the first letter is found in:
The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write. 2 Thes.3:17

From this I conclude that they did not know his handwriting up to that point; in that case this must have been his first letter to them.
It also follows from this that, during the short time Paul had spent in Thessalonica, he had evidently not only preached the gospel to them, but also told them how our dispensation will end, and how the next one will begin. So he had not only spoken about the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, but also about His coming again, together with the circumstances that go with it: the 'revealing of the man of sin', 'the son of perdition', the dawning of 'the day of the Lord', and the course of 'the seventieth week of Daniel'. Of this he says: 'For yourselves know perfectly…'.
The thought is that the preaching of the gospel did not concern only the past work of Christ, but most definitely also His second coming. That is what believers over the next 2,000 years were to look forward to as their living hope:
Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; [Titus2:13]
That the apostles in their preaching and their letters are continually speaking about the second coming of Christ does not mean they thought it would definitely be in their own lifetime, even though they may indeed have hoped so. That question simply does not play a decisive role. It means rather that their expectation was directed that way. That was their blessed hope.
Their testimony
Their reputation spread quickly, and Paul refers to that as well. The word of the Lord, the gospel, had 'sounded out' from them, to 'every place' – so also beyond Greece, into the whole then–known world. Paul was aware of this and writes to the Thessalonians how glad he is about them. Strictly speaking that is not the subject and theme of the letter,

but it does not alter the fact that the first three chapters of these five concern precisely this.
In the last chapter, number 5, we find the familiar exhortations and warm greetings. The real thrust and content of the letter is found only in the second half of chapter 4 and the first half of chapter 5. In general, that part is the best known section. In my Bible there is a heading over chapter 4 from verse 13 and the first verses of chapter 5: 'Of the coming of Christ'. But what the letter is really about is not so much His coming, as 'the future of the Church', more specifically: 'our going there' – what we usually call 'the rapture of the Church', derived from:
Why our future matters now. - For our life as children of God, here and now, the point is the future that has been promised to us and that is secured in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What we look forward to is His coming. That is what shapes the present.
The worldly way of thinking is that our present is determined by our past. That can be defended, but only with the Bible closed. Scripture says that our present is determined by the future that we have. That is exactly what distinguishes us from the unregenerate. We are not simply stumbling on from some past and background. On the contrary: we are on our way to the future that God has promised us – that is what this letter is about. Our present life as Christians is indeed decisive for the future we will have with the Lord after the rapture of the Church. At a certain point in time that catching up – that change of ours – will take place, and then that 'future' begins.
In songs you sometimes come across the idea that we shall all be equal in heaven; as if the socialist ideal will finally be realised. But that is not so. We shall not all be the same there. Thank God we shall not! I would be terribly bored if you were exactly like me – and no doubt you the other way round as well. We are different here, and we shall be different there.
1 Corinthians 12 (and also, if need be, chapter 14) teaches that we are one body with many different members, each having a different function. That is not so much for the sake of our time here in the flesh; God is still at work with us. We are on the way, still being brought up, as it were. We are to grow in knowledge, in faith. We are to 'grow up unto a perfect man'. For the Church as a whole that will only be completed after and with the beginning of the rapture of the Church, when the final destination and goal will be reached.
So the apostle sets out here that, once we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, that moment is the beginning of the story, not the end. Before that beginning comes, we are being prepared for it. That is why this letter, which speaks about the future, is of great importance for our present life.
In that connection I quote already what we read in:
For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: [1 Thess.4:3]
We shall come back to that, but for the moment my point is this: our future position is not a sort of great collecting–vat into which all believers are thrown as if in the end everything is simply the same – as though we could say: if you are a believer, then in the future you will go to heaven, full stop. According to James in Acts 15, God is now 'visiting the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name' – a Church out of the saints, 'kings and priests'. It is only logical that God has the highest possible purpose with that.